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VOLUME 101



INTERPRETATION AND ALLEGORY

ANTIQUITY TO THE MODERN PERIOD

EDITED
WITH INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS BY

JON WHITMAN



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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

*To my wife, Ahuva,
and
to my daughter, Naomi Eliora*

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PREFACE

The act of interpretation has a way of turning into the subject of interpretation itself. A telling case in point is the theory and practice of allegorical interpretation in the West.

During the past century, thousands of studies have discussed diverse aspects of interpretive allegory. These discussions have extended from brief reflections to expansive volumes, devoted to topics ranging from the explication of a specific scriptural term to the reading of ancient mythology at large. Such investigations have been complemented by a multitude of analyses of compositional allegory, ranging from brief figures of speech to elaborately codified stories. The contemporary effort to characterize allegorical interpretation—one of the formative interpretive activities in the West—is inseparable from this continuing critical history.

Yet for all the variety and value of this history, the effort to engage interpretive allegory at large has recurrently entailed severe problems. Its theoretical and practical expressions are scattered in a formidable number of texts, situated in an imposing array of places and periods, composed in a host of idioms and forms. Scholarly discussions of it are themselves frequently dispersed in an extraordinary range of specialized studies. Even the most capacious works on the subject, central to contemporary scholarship on allegorical interpretation, have understandably tended to concentrate on specific periods such as antiquity, or particular approaches such as typology, or disparate episodes in the general movement of allegory.

In the opening chapter of this volume, I discuss some of the difficulties in any attempt to develop a composite view of such a variegated subject. At least in this life, to imagine a 'definitive' account of the theory and practice of allegorical interpretation in the West would require something of an allegorical vision in its own right. But perhaps the intensive research of past years has nonetheless promoted the possibility of a more accessible order, a coordinate framework with which to assess the subject in its very diversity.

To my knowledge, this volume is the first study that offers in detail a historical and conceptual framework for approaching interpretive allegory at large in the West. While its broad dimensions—

chronological, cultural, and critical—are central to its orientation, its specific format is a practical, ‘working’ design, arranged to encourage reinterpretation in turn.

In chronological scope, the study explores interpretive activity during a period of over two thousand years, from antique glosses and exegetical treatises to modern and ‘postmodern’ critical theories. Demarcating some of the principal interpretive movements during this period, it provides detailed analyses of those movements at critical points in their development.

In cultural perspective, the volume incorporates extensive analyses of allegorical theory and practice in distinctly pagan, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic communities, along with more eclectic ones. While it examines internal strains within those communities concerning the conditions and problems of interpretive transfer, it indicates with extensive cross-references a range of overlapping concerns in different social orders.

In critical approach, the work draws upon research from a host of disciplines—the study of literature, religion, art, philosophy, and social history. Situating the approaches of specific essays in terms of important changes in scholarly perspective during the past century, the introductory chapters assess some of the far-reaching implications of contemporary research for the significance of allegory at large.

But if it may be useful to suggest in advance what the design of the study is, it is also important to stress what it is not.

First, it does not aim to provide a ‘comprehensive’ account of all cases of allegorical theory and practice, whether in the form of a systematic ‘history’ or an explanatory ‘model.’ As the opening chapter suggests, the subject is hardly susceptible to such an enterprise. In any case, it is scarcely feasible in a single volume even to mention all the important versions of allegorical interpretation in the West. Some of the scholarly treatments of its manifold expressions can be found in the variety of works cited in the detailed annotation of chapters 1, 2, and 12; the numerous references in other chapters; and the extensive research specified in the list of contributors near the end of the volume.

Second, the study does not aim to propose a strict ‘definition’ of allegory and to align its discussions with such a definition. As the introductory chapters indicate, the definition of ‘allegory’ fluctuates radically in both historical and conceptual terms. The study deliberately includes forms of interpretation that overlap in varying degrees

with such modulating terms of reference. Similarly, while interpretive allegory is a vast topic in its own right, it is not possible to separate it austere from compositional allegory itself. Though the study is designed to concentrate on interpretive developments, it pointedly calls attention to a number of compositional forms, from exemplary tales to personification narratives to emblematic designs.

Finally, the study does not aim to present the structures of its own design as fixed in form or privileged in status. As the introductory chapters emphasize, it would be possible to adjust the structures, supplement the categories, or revise the analysis in a multitude of ways. The flexible configuration it offers aims not to close options for further investigation, but to open opportunities for changing perspectives.

The volume is the outcome of an interdisciplinary research project I designed and conducted under the auspices of the Center for Literary Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The early stages of this project included four international colloquia I organized in 1994–1995 on the subject, ‘Allegory and Cultural Change’ from antiquity to the modern period. The principal presentations at these colloquia were later revised by their authors and edited by me with the prospect of this volume in mind. Those detailed analyses, with their intersecting lines of inquiry, comprise all but the introductory chapters of this volume. The introductory essays in chapters 1, 2, and 12 reflect on these investigations and related subjects in the context of shifting critical attitudes toward allegory as a whole.

The list of contributors near the end of the volume notes the variety of academic specialties and some of the distinguished research of the authors of essays on specific topics in this study. In editing their essays, I have allowed some differences in convention and style, including approaches to capitalization and punctuation, norms of British and American spelling, methods of transliteration, and forms of annotation. I hope that the broader diversity of perspective and the variegated range of outlook displayed by these authors will contribute to a dialogue among readers who seek to extend their acquaintance with scholarship on interpretation beyond their own fields of concentration.

To the authors I express my gratitude for their valuable presentations at the original colloquia, their cooperation and patience during the intricate process of preparing a study of this complexity for publication, and their rich contributions to the volume itself. I am

also grateful to others who contributed to the original colloquia by moderating sessions or by sharing their research in thoughtful remarks of their own. They include Mira Friedman, Orly Goldwasser, Juliette Hassine, Boaz Huss, Berel Dov Lerner, Shulamit Levy, Doron Narkiss, Avigdor W.G. Posèq, Shalom Sabar, Shimon Sandbank, David Satran, Daniel R. Schwartz, Ellen Spolsky, and Sarah Stroumsa. I would like to include a word of collective acknowledgment to the student assistants from the Department of English of the Hebrew University who provided practical help with the colloquia.

The support of the Center for Literary Studies was indispensable to this project. I wish to express my thanks to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, who presided over the Center at the time I proposed and began to prepare the project, and to Sanford Budick, the Center's founding and current Director, who presided over the Center during the time of the colloquia themselves. On behalf of the Center, I also wish to thank Eliyahu Honig, Associate Vice-President of the Hebrew University, for his sustained work in facilitating the Center's activities. The volume and the project underlying it were made possible by the generous support of the Shirley Palmer Collier Endowment Fund for Literary Studies. With sadness I record the recent passing of Shirley Palmer Collier.

During the course of my work I received support from the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities of the Hebrew University. A host of librarians in Israel and abroad helped to make requested material accessible to me. For kind personal and scholarly assistance during a late period of my work, I express my appreciation to Piero Boitani and Etan Kohlberg.

With respect to the process leading to publication of the volume itself, I wish to acknowledge the support of A.J. Vanderjagt, general editor of Brill's *Studies in Intellectual History*, and Theo Joppe and Job Lisman, editors at Brill at early stages in that process. I owe special thanks to Ivo Romein, the editor at Brill who graciously and patiently facilitated the passage of the work to press. The cooperative activity in which I designed with Izzy Pludwinski the illustration for the book jacket had the benefit of his expert calligraphy and artistic sensitivity.

There are some forms of support for which I am indebted beyond my limits of expression. Although no words of mine can adequately convey my love for members of my family, by far my deepest personal debts to individuals are to them. My work continues to draw

upon the lasting guidance, encouragement, and inspiration of my parents. Though the life of my mother did not extend to the time of this project, the length of years granted to my father remains a source of special blessing for me. My wife, Ahuva, helped to sustain me throughout the years of the project with her devoted care and her discerning counsel. Every phase of the project, from plans for the colloquia to work on the volume, was enhanced by her keen powers of mind, her alert sense of humor, and her abiding warmth of spirit. My daughter, Naomi Eliora, only a few years old when the colloquia began, welcomed guests to our home in Jerusalem with gifts of her wondrous imagination. The cherished gift of her life daily enriches my own. At times I think that conditions of understanding in the world she explores may be broadened, at least in some measure, by some contribution of mine to this book. But I know that sustained forms of loving understanding long given to me by both my wife and my daughter made possible the very conditions of life in which I wrote. I hope the dedication of this book to Ahuva and to Naomi Eliora will help me to suggest, however inadequately, how indebted I am to them for those generous acts of interpretation.

Jon Whitman

Jerusalem, Israel

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

A RETROSPECTIVE FORWARD: INTERPRETATION, ALLEGORY, AND HISTORICAL CHANGE

Jon Whitman

- i. *Interpreting the history of interpretation*
- ii. *Perceptions of the past over a generation ago*
- iii. *Passages to the present*

i. *Interpreting the history of interpretation*

An ‘insane’ activity, the ‘refuge of unskillfulness’—that is how one Protestant scholar, commenting in the seventeenth century, described allegorical interpretation in some of its most prominent forms.¹ He was not the first to express his disenchantment. A century earlier Luther had called allegory a ‘beautiful harlot who fondles men in such a way that it is impossible for her not to be loved.’ But he announced that he had escaped her embrace: ‘I hate allegories.’² More recently, a German scholar described allegorical interpretation in antiquity as a kind of ‘weed’ proliferating over the intellectual life

¹ For the principles of annotation in this chapter, including references to times of publication and ‘prior versions’ of recent studies, see the introductory note to ‘Works Cited’ at the end of the chapter.

For the Protestant scholar (Sixtinus Amama), see *Annotata ad librum psalms* in Pearson et al. 1698, vol. 3, column 668: ‘Fuitque insanum illud studium asyllum imperitiae.’ It is possible to translate *imperitia* as ‘ignorance,’ and the index of the 1698 edition, citing this discussion of allegory, specifically uses the phrase ‘asyllum ignorantiae.’ The term *insanus*, of course, has a range of meanings (not only a ‘medical’ one); compare the reference to ‘madness’ in n. 3 below. An allusion to Amama’s comment in a loose translation appears in Allen 1970, p. 244, although he refers to the 1660 edition of Pearson et al., which as far as I have been able to determine does not include the passage. Amama’s own practice is less hostile to ‘allegory’ than his comment might suggest. See, e.g., his Christological treatment of Psalm 2 in vol. 3, column 12, and compare the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century treatments of the ‘literal’ sense of psalms cited in note 23 below.

² For Luther’s comments, see Allen 1970, p. 240.

of the Roman Empire.³ In a reverie I sometimes imagine myself writing an extended interpretation of the figures of speech by which critics describe allegorical interpretation. But the reverie always ends abruptly with someone protesting that it is 'unskillful,' if not 'insane,' to subject the figurative language of such critics to allegorical interpretation in turn.

Not everyone, of course, has been so critical of allegorical interpretation. Many of the most important commentators in antiquity and the Middle Ages regularly practiced it, and even during the past century, some have argued that it is quite a normal thing for interpreters to do. Admittedly, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was rare to find any expression of this attitude, even in the loose use of the term by G.K. Chesterton: 'There can be no doubt among sane men that the critic should be allegorical.'⁴ In the closing decades of the century, however, an increasing number of scholars suggest that allegorical interpretation is a form of critical balance, a way in which individual interpreters and whole communities seek to 'make sense' of old or strange texts in new or familiar circumstances. From this perspective, a host of civilizations developing from the Middle East to western Europe and beyond it have made allegorical interpretation inseparable from their very sense of rationality itself.

Perhaps each of these positions has its point. For the turn to allegorical interpretation repeatedly marks civilizations trying to keep—or in danger of losing—their intellectual and spiritual equilibrium. Already in early antiquity, allegorical interpretation helped to preserve a formative cultural idiom, the discourse of Greek mythology, as belief in that mythology began to fail. By the Hellenistic period, it helped to provide a framework for Greco-Roman philosophic tendencies within a different religion, Judaism, and at nearly the same time, to promote inside Judaism a revolutionary movement toward a new religion, Christianity. In the Middle Ages, it reoriented critical approaches not only to foundational works, but to the world at large, sometimes provoking fundamental conceptual and social crises within the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic communities. By the Renais-

³ See Lamberton 1992, p. 133, where the scholar is not named. Compare the earlier comment of the nineteenth-century scholar August Friedrich Gfrörer on Philo of Alexandria's allegorical orientation: 'It is madness, but there's a method in it'; cited by Ginzberg 1955 (prior version 1901), p. 130.

⁴ See Chesterton 1907, p. xi. I owe this reference to Morton Bloomfield.

sance, it provided radical methods to realign a range of texts and signs from different times and settings into systems of 'universal' knowledge and 'scientific' inquiry. From the Enlightenment to the 'postmodern' period, it has passed from an underlying, sometimes unconscious source of new ideological and imaginative forms into the foreground, even the fashion, of critical analysis.⁵

Yet despite the persistent importance of allegorical interpretation, no one has written a systematic history of it from antiquity to the modern period. There are reasons for this omission. One is the sheer vastness of such a project. To attempt a history of allegorical interpretation in the West would almost be to attempt a history of Western cultural change itself. It would require close acquaintance with over two thousand years of interpretive theory and practice, a host of regions and peoples, and a variety of genres and languages, including Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic, and the Romance and Germanic languages. Even then there would be pressing practical problems. From antiquity, for example, some of the most important writings of prominent Greek and Christian allegorists have been lost. It has been remarked that of 291 books of commentaries by the prolific Christian interpreter Origen alone, 275 have been lost in their original Greek versions, with little remaining in Latin.⁶ Even from the Renaissance, a number of significant interpretive works have never received contemporary critical editions, with detailed notes, indices, and commentary. As widely influential a text as Vincenzo Cartari's *Imagini de i dei de gli antichi* has acquired a modern edition only during the past decade.⁷ No single scholar could master more than a small portion of such a complex and elusive array of subjects. Yet histories of Western culture, even histories of 'civilization' as a whole, however dated in fashion and deficient in conception, have been attempted. The sheer expanse of allegorical interpretation is not the sole reason for the limits of its investigation.

There is another reason for the lack of such a history, 'internal' to the notion of allegory itself. Allegorical interpretation is not exactly a single 'kind' of interpretation. To engage 'it' seriously is to encounter

⁵ For these developments, see my more extensive account in chapters 2 and 12 below.

⁶ See the assessment of J. Quasten, cited by Runia 1993, p. 172, n. 78.

⁷ See the edition of Auzzas et al. 1996; on early editions of the *Imagini* (the title of which varies in form), see pp. 601-18, with the discussion of Mulryan 1981 about early versions of the work in different languages.

not just a system of beliefs or a set of conceptual 'norms,' but a series of critical negotiations. Acts of interpretive allegory are transactions between fluctuating critical communities and formative texts. While these transactions regularly draw upon shared interpretive methods, they are situated in times and places, marked by tensions and polemics, that are specific to each historical community and its developing canon. It thus produces very limited results to try to outline the allegorization of a single text (for example, Jewish Scripture—which for Jews is the principal 'reading,' the *Mikra*, but for Christians, only part of the principal reading, and for Moslems, a partial misreading) or to try to isolate a single 'form' of interpretation (for example, cosmological, or psychological, or ethical analysis). The complexity of the problem is dramatized when allegorical interpreters expressly deny to others a 'form' of interpretation that they apparently defend for themselves. When the classical philologist Johannes Geffcken composed an encyclopedia article near the beginning of the twentieth century on 'Allegory, Allegorical Interpretation' (devoted almost exclusively to antiquity), he found himself 'bewildered' by an antique 'confusion of terms'; early Christian Apologists opposed pagan allegory but themselves used allegorical interpretation, while the pagan Celsus attacked Christian allegory yet was 'an allegorist himself.' For Geffcken, in any case, allegorical interpretation betrayed a deeper confusion about texts. Both parties, he complained, 'Greeks as well as Christians, tread the same erroneous path.'⁸

This expression of displeasure suggests a third reason limiting the study of allegorical interpretation. For much of the past several centuries, such interpretation has frequently been approached with conspicuous unease. In part this unease is the result of Reformation and Romantic arguments that 'allegory' violates the historical particularity and imaginative integrity of texts. By the nineteenth century, when philologists and other historians were applying to a host of subjects massive efforts of historical 'recovery,' allegorical interpretation was frequently conceived as a procedure alien to the principles of proper philology itself. Alternative approaches to historical recovery in post-Romantic 'hermeneutics,' emphasizing the effort to understand the conditions under which a text was created, found allegory scarcely less alien a procedure. Dilthey considered it an apologetic device, 'an art as indispensable as it is useless.'⁹ But beyond its uneasy recep-

⁸ See Geffcken 1908, p. 330.

⁹ See Heinemann 1981 (prior version 1950–1), p. 248.

tion in recent centuries, the very notion of *allēgoria*—a disparity between the apparent sense of speaking (Greek *agoreuein*) and some ‘other’ sense (Greek *allos*)—has long implied a certain dissonance, even for those who have endorsed it. The *alieniloquium* (‘other-speaking’), Isidore of Seville called it in his seventh-century Latin, and long afterwards, the notion of *alienus*, the ‘other,’ recurs explicitly in the definitions of allegorical interpreters.¹⁰ Even today, when it has become fashionable again to speak of the ‘other,’ to *encounter* it in allegorical interpretation remains somewhat jolting. Not everyone will be persuaded by the Hellenistic Jewish exegete Philo that the biblical injunction not to eat the fruit of trees for three years (Leviticus 19:23) suggests that the fruit of instruction remains intact throughout the threefold division of time into past, present, and future.¹¹ Nor will everyone be convinced by the early medieval Christian mythographer Fulgentius that the shipwreck at the opening of the *Aeneid* signifies the dangers of childbirth.¹² Such readers may sympathize with a remark made already in antiquity by Basil the Great while interpreting Genesis, a text that by his time had been extensively allegorized. ‘I know the laws of allegory,’ he sighed, but ‘for me, grass is grass.’¹³ Part of the difficulty of assessing allegorical interpretation is that such an assessment is itself an interpretive act, inescapably situated—comfortably or uncomfortably—in the very history it seeks to assess.

ii. *Perceptions of the past over a generation ago*

This suggests that any critique of allegorical interpretation is also an implicit commentary on the critic’s own interpretive positions. To put those positions in perspective, it might be helpful to compare attitudes toward the subject over a generation ago with more recent points of view. If someone writing prior to one of the conspicuous turning points in the development of much recent criticism, the late

¹⁰ For Isidore, see Whitman 1987, p. 266. Compare the twelfth-century interpreter of Christian Scripture, Hugh of St. Victor, on *alieniloquium* (cited on the same page); the fourteenth-century mythographer Boccaccio on what is ‘alien’ or ‘different,’ cited in Allen 1970, p. 217; and the sixteenth-century Reformation theologian William Tyndale on ‘strange speaking,’ cited in Allen, p. 242. More generally, see Whitman 1981, p. 63.

¹¹ See Philo, *De Plantatione* 27, 113–16, pp. 270–3 in the translation of Colson and Whitaker 1930.

¹² See Fulgentius, trans. Whitbread 1971, p. 125.

¹³ See Horbury 1988, p. 770.

1960s, had tried to construct an outline of allegorical interpretation from antiquity to the modern period—as far as I can tell, no one did try—how would the analysis have proceeded?

Though an analysis in the mid-1960s ('extending' as far as 1967) would have been able to draw upon a number of detailed studies exploring diverse aspects of allegorical interpretation in different periods, it would have been extremely difficult to integrate this material. Perhaps something of the difficulty can be suggested by a select list of some of the principal works then available, grouped according to broad categories and arranged within those categories according to the successive historical periods (for example, antiquity, the Middle Ages) on which they concentrate. In several cases only brief forms of the original titles with their initial publication dates are given here. The list of 'Works Cited' at the end of this chapter provides information about dates and titles (for example, English translations) of some later versions.

On the allegorical interpretation of early mythology and philosophy, fundamental studies by 1967 included Félix Buffière, *Les Mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque* (1956), Jean Pépin, *Mythe et allégorie: les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes* (1958), a range of works from the 1930s to the 1960s by Pierre Courcelle, among them 'Les pères de l'église devant les enfers virgiliens' (1955) and *La Consolation de philosophie dans la tradition littéraire* (1967), a series of articles from the 1950s and 1960s by Édouard Jeuneau (later collected in his '*Lectio philosophorum*' [1973]), including 'L'Usage de la notion d'*integumentum* à travers les gloses de Guillaume de Conches' (1957), Jean Seznec, *La Survivance des dieux antiques* (1940), Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (1958), and Frank E. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (1959).

On the allegorization of Christian Scripture, basic analyses and overviews included Erich Auerbach, 'Figura' (1938), Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (1956), Jean Daniélou, *Sacramentum futuri: Études sur les origines de la typologie biblique* (1950), Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale* (1959–64), Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (1940), M.-D. Chenu, *La théologie au douzième siècle* (1957), A.C. Charity, *Events and Their Afterlife* (1966), Gerhard Ebeling, 'Die Anfänge von Luthers Hermeneutik' (1951), S.L. Greenslade, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day* (1963), Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation*

of the Bible (1965), and James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr., eds., *The New Hermeneutic* (1964).

On allegory in Jewish and Islamic interpretation, important studies included Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo* (1947), Isaak Heinemann, 'Altjüdische Allegoristik' (1936), *The Methods of the Aggadah* (1949, Hebrew), and 'Die wissenschaftliche Allegoristik des jüdischen Mittelalters' (1950–1), Ignaz Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koran-auslegung* (1920), Henry Corbin, *Avicenne et le récit visionnaire* (1952–4) and *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (1964), George F. Hourani's introduction to *Averroes: On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (1961), Julius Guttman, *Die Philosophie des Judentums* (1933), Leo Strauss, 'The Literary Character of the *Guide for the Perplexed*' (1941), Shlomo Pines's introduction to his translation of *The Guide of the Perplexed* (1963), and Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941) and 'The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism' (1956).

Finally, on critical theories of allegory, valuable discussions included Reinhart Hahn, *Die Allegorie in der antiken Rhetorik* (1967), Friedrich Ohly, 'Vom geistigen Sinn des Wortes im Mittelalter' (1958–9), Johan Chydenius, *The Theory of Medieval Symbolism* (1960), Robert L. Montgomery, Jr., 'Allegory and the Incredible Fable: The Italian View from Dante to Tasso' (1966), E.H. Gombrich, 'Icones Symbolicae: The Visual Image in Neo-Platonic Thought' (1948), Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928), René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950*, vols. 1–2 (1955), Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), and Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (1964).

It should be stressed that many other important studies of these subjects were available by 1967, including works by J. Tate, Hugo Rahner, Simone Viarre, Erwin Panofsky, C. Spicq, R.P.C. Hanson, Herman Hailperin, Edmund Stein, Richard McKeon, Karl Giehlow, and a host of others. The list above only suggests some of the studies that framed the study of allegorical interpretation over a generation ago. Drawing upon such studies, an outline in the mid-1960s might have proceeded along something like the following lines.

1. Allegorical interpretation begins in Greek antiquity with the philosophic interpretation of Homer and Hesiod during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. Interpretation of this kind aims to give a 'scientific' or 'ethical' rationale to mythological stories. With Stoic analysis of the Hellenistic period, ranging from philosophers such as

Chrysippus to the first-century-C.E. commentator Cornutus, allegorical interpretation develops into a sweeping transformation of mythological figures into physical or moral principles. By late antiquity, Neoplatonic interpreters such as Porphyry and Proclus are giving a more 'spiritualized' or 'mystical' reading to mythological texts, treating them as accounts of the passage of the soul through different levels of the cosmos.

2. Already in the Hellenistic period, Greek allegorical methods are adapted to the exegesis of Jewish Scripture by philosophically inclined, Hellenized Jews, especially Philo of Alexandria (first century B.C.E. – first century C.E.). More programmatically philosophic than midrashic forms of interpretation developing in the Land of Israel, these Alexandrian methods are in turn adapted to the Christian Bible, especially by the 'esoteric' commentators Clement and Origen (second – third centuries C.E.) of the Alexandrian school. In more diffused forms, such strategies are employed by late antique Christians at large, who also use them, at first tentatively, to Christianize pagan mythology and to spiritualize natural phenomena. Whereas allegorical techniques of this kind frequently tend to devalue the literal and historical sense of texts or phenomena, Christians as early as Paul promote a kind of interpretive transfer that preserves the literal sense in the special case of sacred Scripture. In such 'figural' or 'typological' interpretation, even the provisional figures of the 'Old' Testament (as well as their spiritual 'fulfillment' in the New Testament) are treated as historical and foundational. In contrast to the school of Alexandria, the late antique school of Antioch stresses this typological approach to sacred history, which deeply informs the later development of Christian scriptural exegesis.

3. In late antiquity and the Middle Ages, such overlapping strains of interpretation are consolidated by Christians such as Cassian, Gregory the Great, Bede, and later interpreters into 'multilevel' methods of scriptural exegesis. In one of the most popular of these systems, the 'fourfold' method of exegesis, an event like the Exodus can be simultaneously understood 1) 'literally' or 'historically,' as the departure of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land; 2) 'allegorically' (with special reference to the typological fulfillment of 'Old' Testament figures in Christ or the Church), as the redemption of Christ; 3) 'morally,' as the conversion of the soul to grace; and 4) 'anagogically' ('leading up' to the other world), as the passage of the soul to eternal glory. Some late medieval Christian mythographers

even develop multidimensional systems of meaning for pagan mythology, arguing (along the lines of the antique interpreter Euhemerus) that imaginative fables about the gods originate in historical facts about human beings. More broadly, by adapting Neoplatonic notions of cosmic hierarchy from the Pseudo-Dionysius (turn of the fifth and sixth centuries) and other philosophers, medieval Christians transform natural phenomena at large into coordinate expressions of a multi-level cosmos.

4. The movement toward mystical or philosophic 'levels' of interpretation also develops, more controversially, in medieval Islamic treatments of the Koran and medieval Jewish interpretations of Hebrew Scripture. In Islam, early efforts to construe forms of 'inner meaning' (*bāṭin*) in Koranic passages and to associate such an investigation with the reader's inner progression of consciousness emerge in several interpretive settings, including 'non-orthodox,' Shiite circles, and continue long after the Middle Ages. More strictly 'philosophic' interpretations of the Koran in the Islamic community at large repeatedly encounter charges of heterodox reading and receive their last methodical defense in the late twelfth century, with the Aristotelian commentator Averroes. In Judaism, allegorical exegesis, promoted especially by the twelfth- and early thirteenth-century philosopher Maimonides and his immediate followers, circulates extensively during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; among many commentators during the same period, however, this kind of analysis is frequently either sharply opposed as an approach to scriptural understanding or broadly subordinated within fourfold systems of Kabbalistic exegesis. Such Kabbalistic systems finally stress not the expositions of philosophy, but the intuition of divine life in the very words and letters of the scriptural text.

5. By the late Middle Ages, Christians increasingly sense that despite their invocation of the scriptural *historia*, their own multilevel method tends to break the biblical narrative into isolated passages of schematic analysis. Countering this tendency are a number of Christian scholastics from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, including Andrew of St. Victor and Nicholas of Lyra. Drawing upon Jewish exegesis of scriptural history and upon Aristotelian critiques of ambivalent language, this late medieval scholastic movement gradually re-directs interest to the historical continuities of the literal sense. Within the late medieval Jewish community, even the most wide-ranging philosophic or Kabbalistic speculation rarely involves a denial of the

literal sense of biblical history or the legal specifications of Scripture, and during this period and long after it the study of Jewish law (*halakhah*) remains central to Jewish intellectual and institutional life.

6. Late medieval Christian concerns about the allegorization of Scripture anticipate sixteenth- and seventeenth-century critiques in the Protestant Reformation. Reformers such as Luther broadly repudiate 'allegory' according to the fourfold method and invoke a 'simple' or 'literal' sense of Christian Scripture, the spiritual dimensions of which become increasingly clear over time. From this perspective, typological significance itself belongs to a single meaning that develops over the continuum of history.

7. Allegorical interpretation continues to flourish in the Renaissance treatment of ancient mythology, culminating in the vast, mid-sixteenth-century mythographic encyclopedias of Giraldi, Conti, and Cartari. This interpretive movement overlaps with iconographic programs for displaying and decoding conspicuously allusive images, ranging from the enigmatic pictograms of hieroglyphics to the intricate designs of emblems. Even in the treatment of non-sacred texts and images, however, counterstrains are developing. The sixteenth-century humanist revival of Aristotle's *Poetics* increasingly inclines critical theorists to seek the organizing principles of imaginative plots not in 'allegory,' but in 'credibility,' and related concepts of the conventions of representation tend to qualify Neoplatonic emphases on iconic mystery. Efforts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to specify the ancient origins of myths, either by Euhemerist methods or by the argument that Hebrew Scripture is the source of pagan stories, gradually encourage an early 'historicist' approach to mythology.

8. By the eighteenth century, the Christian Bible is increasingly approached from a 'rationalist' perspective that seeks to explain scriptural narrative not by typological interpretation but by a 'historical-critical' investigation of the text's origins and development. At times such investigations tend to consign biblical stories to the realm of early mythological expression. The study of Greek and Roman mythology itself increasingly turns from allegorical interpretation to 'historicist' and comparative analysis in the work of Fontenelle, Fréret, and later critics who seek to codify the linguistic, anthropological, and social features of 'primitive' beliefs. In literary theory, Neoclassical norms of clarity and propriety tend to reduce mythological allusions and 'allegorical' figures to the status of imaginative ornaments to a poem's rational design.

9. The growing critique of allegory since the late medieval period becomes particularly sharp in the nineteenth century. In Christian biblical study, the movement toward cultural analysis rather than allegorical exposition intensifies, as the historical-critical method expands in range and influence. From a different perspective, a more general 'hermeneutics' promoted by Schleiermacher and others treats understanding itself not as the specification of a text's 'point' but as the reader's own reconstruction of the creative consciousness from which the text emerges. In Romantic literary theory, critics such as Goethe and Coleridge devalue the very term 'allegory,' applying it to a schematic, even arbitrary technique of signification. By contrast, they argue, a 'symbol' substantially belongs to the whole that it evokes; it is not displaced by what it reveals. Similar attitudes inform the study of mythology. For Schelling, a mythological figure is itself inseparable from its overall significance; to allegorize it is to violate its integrity.

10. Though such nineteenth-century views continue well into the twentieth century, strains gradually appear in their theoretical and practical designs. Shortly after the formulation of one of the programs issuing from various 'historical' and 'hermeneutical' investigations of Christian Scripture, Bultmann's proposal to 'demythologize' scriptural narrative, some commentators are suggesting that such 'demythologization' resembles ancient Alexandrian allegorization. In critical theory, Romantic notions of the abiding spiritual value of the 'symbol' come under forceful attack by Benjamin, who counters that 'allegory' exposes the very historical process which disrupts any such effort to unite ephemeral objects with eternal ideas. Benjamin's critique, however, does not circulate widely until considerably after the middle of the twentieth century. More broadly, drawing upon the psychological and anthropological theories of Freud, Jung, and Frazer, critical theorists frequently turn 'symbols' and 'myths' themselves into hidden, explanatory structures underlying texts, a tendency regarded by some critics as too close to allegorization. Certain theorists invoking such latent structures, including Northrop Frye (1957) and Angus Fletcher (1964), argue that 'all' commentary is in some measure 'allegorical,' but by 1967 (the closing date of this composite overview), it is unclear to what degree this claim will be accepted. Despite the apparent devaluation of 'allegory' for centuries, by this date the very destiny of both the term and the kinds of transfer that are assigned to it remains ambiguous.

Admittedly, any effort to reduce 2500 years of interpretive activity to ten brief reference points is almost as risky an enterprise as trying to reduce the regulations of the Bible to ten commandments. It would be possible of course to include other distinctions and developments, to vary the emphases and nuances, and, more broadly, to reconceive the general structure of the analysis. My concern at the moment, however, is not that this outline, projected 'backward' to 1967, is too sketchy, but that it is too 'developed,' too smoothly *au courant*, with too much of the present projected into it. (As one 'hermeneutic' claim has it, such is the inevitable 'fore-understanding' by which contemporary readers situate themselves with regard to past developments.) In 1967, for example, it would have been hard to find a study of allegorical interpretation that concentrated on more than one or two historical 'periods' (usually antiquity and the Middle Ages); that sustained a systematic comparison among different 'spheres' of interpretation, including scriptural exegesis, mythographic writing, and critical theory; that devoted even one chapter out of ten to medieval Jewish and Islamic developments (unless the study concentrated on one of those subjects, in which case the problem would have been reversed); or that treated the Romantic theory of the 'symbol' as considerably less revolutionary than 'evolutionary.' The need to construct this general outline 'retrospectively' itself suggests such problems of orientation over a generation ago.

This is not to say that these problems have been resolved in the current generation. On the contrary, as I have suggested, fundamental difficulties in coordinating and comparing the diverse developments of allegorical interpretation still (perhaps necessarily) mark contemporary scholarship. Nor is it to say that the basic organization of this retrospective outline has been largely superseded. In fact, a considerable part of its design remains 'normative' today. Its interest for the study of interpretation, however, lies not just in its explicit arrangement of previous interpretive movements, but in its own implicit attitudes toward them. In most of the critical works on allegorical interpretation reflected in this outline, allegory is an intriguing subject of historic importance and a fascinating topic of scholarly investigation, but a rather strained, even arbitrary approach to textual understanding. There are exceptions to this attitude, as in the work of writers like de Lubac committed to certain institutional developments of the Church and writers like Frye inclined to argue for latent structures in texts at large (though even Frye, as I suggest below, is perhaps not as accommodating to 'allegory' as he might

seem). But in general scholarship several decades ago treats not just allegorical composition, but allegorical interpretation itself, as a kind of *alieniloquium*, a somewhat 'alien' form of discourse. At times the critical expression of this attitude is far more conspicuous than it is in this outline. Allegorical interpretation, it is often maintained or implied, is interpretation 'imposed' upon a text; it is 'abstract' in conception; it tends to 'close' the range of interpretive possibilities; it is 'ahistorical' in orientation. It may not be a 'harlot' or a 'weed,' but in the 'skillful' state of scholarship, how 'sane' would it be to apply it to the present?

iii. *Passages to the present*

In the last few decades, however, something of the 'alien' seems to have passed out of the *alieniloquium*. For an increasing number of critics theorizing about encounters with 'other' texts and times, 'other-speaking' seems to speak their language. To try to 'explain' this change in attitude would be like trying to 'explain' historical change as a whole. But there are ways to situate the change, which, like every development in the interpretation of interpretation, is likely to change in turn.

It can be argued, for example, that general notions about allegorical interpretation like those just indicated—the notions of allegory as 'imposed,' 'abstract,' 'closed,' and 'ahistorical'—have changed with the transformation of critical attitudes at large since the late 1960s.¹⁴ To many, allegory no longer seems so peculiar a form of 'imposition' when a range of critical movements from contemporary 'hermeneutics' to 'reader response' criticism argue that readers at large regularly 'intervene' in the texts they engage.¹⁵ While it is still common to associate allegory with 'abstraction,' the association has been complicated by the argument that every form of discourse is 'figured' and that philosophic discourse itself exhibits 'literary' features of genre, plot, perspective, and style.¹⁶ If for some allegory remains a means of interpretive 'closure,' for others it is a way of opening

¹⁴ Compare my more extensive account in chapters 2 and 12 below.

¹⁵ For examples of how such movements have affected attitudes toward allegory, see Crossan 1976, pp. 264–78; Wittig 1976, pp. 333–40; and Copeland and Melville 1991.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Cascardi 1987; Marshall 1987; Lang 1990. Works by Jacques Derrida (e.g., 1974 [prior version 1967]) are a major influence upon such studies.

texts that would otherwise remain inscrutably closed, developing the conditions in which readers can encounter them.¹⁷ While it is still often argued that allegory is a form of 'dehistoricization,' some have suggested that 'historicization' has its own allegorical tendencies, correlating texts with the 'spirit' of the age or the ideology of the critic.¹⁸ From such perspectives, allegorical interpretation seems scarcely more alien than interpretation at large.

Attitudes toward allegory over a generation ago, however, have changed not only with broad movements in critical theory, but with intensive studies of the principles and practice of allegory from antiquity to the modern period. In the essays that introduce the two parts of this volume—'Present Perspectives: Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages' (chapter 2) and 'Present Perspectives: The Late Middle Ages to the Modern Period' (chapter 12)—I discuss some of the implications of recent research on topics ranging from ancient treatments of mythology to contemporary theories of signification. The distinct sections of these introductions broadly correspond to the subjects treated individually by the contributors to this volume. For the moment, in closing this 'retrospective forward,' I want only to call attention to some of the questions implied by one particularly prominent expression of changes in attitude toward allegorical interpretation at large.

This is the view that 'all' commentary or interpretation is basically 'allegorical.' In recent decades some variant of this view has appeared among scholars belonging to an array of different 'schools' and working on a range of different periods and fields—antiquity (e.g., A.A. Long); the Middle Ages (e.g., Morton W. Bloomfield); the Renaissance (e.g., Angus Fletcher and Maureen Quilligan); and contemporary theory (e.g., Fredric Jameson and Gerald L. Bruns)¹⁹—to give only a partial list of influential writers. This broad application of the term 'allegorical' still does not dominate scholarly practice as a whole, which normally does not apply the term to a range of interpretive procedures, from grammatical notes on an ancient text to historical background for a modern novel. For some (like myself),

¹⁷ See Bloomfield 1972; Bruns 1987, pp. 640–2; and Bruns 1992, pp. 85–6.

¹⁸ For suggestions of this kind from different perspectives about diverse acts of 'historicization,' see, e.g., Frei 1974 and 1986, and Jameson 1981; compare White 1973 on 'emplotment' in historiography.

¹⁹ See Long 1992, p. 43; Bloomfield 1972, p. 301, n. 1; Fletcher 1964, p. 8; Quilligan 1979, pp. 15–16; Jameson 1981, pp. 10, 58; Bruns 1992, pp. 15, 85–6, 215–16, 230–1, 241; compare the qualification on p. 102.

the recent expansive use of the term 'allegorical' is deeply questionable in both conceptual and historical terms.²⁰ But however the usage is evaluated, it is important to understand the conditions under which it has developed. To point to Frye, explicitly cited by many of those who broadly use the term, would be to expose only part of the issue. For Frye's position has its own history, and that history displays some of the deepest ironies in the interpretation of interpretation.

The most prominent and avid enthusiasts of what is normally called 'allegorical' interpretation, after all, did not share the view that 'all' interpretation is allegorical. Such a notion would have seemed strange to allegorists as diverse in intellectual and spiritual orientation as Philo, Heraclitus the Allegorizer, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Augustine, Cassian, and Proclus in antiquity; Gregory the Great, Bede, Raban Maur, Arnulf of Orleans, Hugh of St. Victor, William of Conches, and Pierre Bersuire in the Middle Ages; and Boccaccio, Landino, Petrus Lavinius, Natale Conti, Giovanni Fabrini, and John Harington in the Renaissance.²¹ For them allegorical interpretation displays some sense of a text that is 'other' than the apparent sense, whether the apparent sense is called 'literal,' 'historical,' 'external,' or something else. This is not to say that the character of this 'apparent' sense is identical for such writers; on the contrary, there is no single criterion by which all of them define the 'literal' sense.²² In fact, one of the most revealing aspects of the history of allegory is the way in which definitions of the 'literal' sense change, so that what is considered 'other' than it changes in turn. But for most of that history interpreters agree that it is one thing to explain the 'apparent' sense of a text, another to explain its 'allegorical' one.

While complications in this approach are sometimes noted in early interpretation, the approach as a whole begins noticeably to change in the late medieval and Reformation interpretation of Christian

²⁰ See, e.g., Whitman 1987, p. 7, n. 4; Whitman 1993a, pp. 31–2; and my remarks in chapter 12 (viii) below.

²¹ See the references to these writers in Whitman 1987, Smalley 1952, and Allen 1970.

²² For some historical variations in the notion of the 'literal' sense, see Preus 1969; Frei 1974 and 1986; Childs 1977; Burrow 1984; Kermode 1986; Tanner 1987; Copeland 1993; Greene-McCreight 1999; my remarks and references below in chapter 2 (viii); and A.J. Minnis's essay with bibliography in chapter 11 of this volume.

Scripture. By the late Middle Ages, such Christian interpretation increasingly tends to include senses once called 'allegorical' *within* the 'literal' sense itself, treated as the 'basic,' 'normative' Christian sense of the text. Thus, for Nicholas of Lyra in the fourteenth century, a passage in Chronicles is said 'literally' (*ad litteram*) of Christ. For James Perez of Valencia in the fifteenth century, a psalm is explained 'allegorically' (*allegorice*) about Christ, or to speak 'more truly,' 'literally' (*verius . . . litteraliter*). For Martin Luther in the sixteenth century, the complaint in a psalm is 'literally' (*ad litteram*) a complaint of Christ.²³ For William Perkins in the seventeenth century, expressing what by his time is a Protestant commonplace, there is but 'one full' sense of 'every place of scripture,' 'and that is also the literal sense.'²⁴ To argue, along the lines of scholarship over a generation ago, that movements of this kind increase interpretive sensitivity to the 'literal' sense is to beg the question. At least in part what they do is to displace the *term* 'allegory' while assigning the 'literal' sense a limitless 'spiritual' scope.

Such notions of 'literal' discourse containing within itself 'spiritual' significance later help to inform Romantic theories of imaginative works of art. Already in the late eighteenth century Kant is arguing that in such imaginative works 'language, as a mere thing of the letter, binds up the spirit' as well. A variety of Romantic theorists tend to apply the term 'symbol' to writing considered to possess this self-contained quality, while relegating the term 'allegorical' to works that signify by denotation, pointing to something other than themselves. For Schelling the object of a 'symbolic' image does not merely 'signify' an idea; it 'is that idea *itself*.' For Coleridge a 'symbol' is a 'medium between *Literal* and *Metaphorical*'; it is always '*tautēgorikon*'—not allegorical, saying something other than itself, but tautegorical, saying something identical with itself.²⁵ In post-Romantic theories of 'symbolic' expression, the significance attributed to the 'symbol' tends to shift from spiritual to more general notions of 'meaning,' and the-

²³ See Preus 1969, pp. 68–9, 105, 146. Compare the essay of A.J. Minnis in this volume. Preus's argument that Luther gradually develops a stronger association between the 'literal' or 'historical' sense and the 'Old Testament situation' (p. 170) does not change the central conceptual and historical point here that 'Christ' remains the reference point of even this 'situated' 'literal' sense; see Preus, pp. 179–80.

²⁴ See Lewalski 1977, p. 81.

²⁵ For these developments, see Todorov 1982 (prior version 1977), pp. 147–221, esp. pp. 190 and 209, and Whitman 1991, p. 168, with the bibliography on pp. 175–6, nn. 24–5.

orists develop an expansive vocabulary to describe how works of art evoke such meaning, from the 'sensuous forms' of a Neo-Kantian like Cassirer to the linguistic 'textures,' 'rhythms,' and 'structures' of the twentieth-century 'New Critics.'²⁶ By contrast, the term 'allegory' refers to the language of designation whereby images are translated into concepts.

The much-cited comment by Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* that 'all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of poetic imagery,' is excerpted from his discussion of the 'theory of symbols.'²⁷ Near the start of this discussion, he writes that the principle that a literary work contains 'a variety or sequence of meanings' has seldom been 'squarely faced' in criticism since the Middle Ages, with its fourfold 'scheme' of meanings (p. 72). But certain aspects of the medieval approach need to be revised for critical theory, he observes; for example, the 'conception of literal meaning as simple descriptive meaning will not do at all for literary criticism' (p. 76). A poem 'cannot be literally anything but a poem' (p. 77); its meaning is 'literally' its 'pattern or integrity as a verbal structure' (p. 78). Poetic images 'do not state or point to anything, but, by pointing to each other, they suggest or evoke the mood which informs the poem' (p. 81). Explicitly invoking the 'new criticism,' he argues that he has now 'established a new sense of the term "literal meaning" for literary criticism' (p. 82 and Frye's note to l. 2). Commentary, he continues, is 'the process of translating into explicit or discursive language what is implicit in the poem' (p. 86). At last comes the influential statement: it is 'not often realized that all commentary is allegorical interpretation . . .' (p. 89). To read this statement nearly half a century after it was written, in the context not only of Frye's larger discussion, but of hundreds of years of shifting approaches to the 'literal' and 'allegorical' senses, is perhaps to suggest somewhat different considerations that may be 'not often realized.'

For Frye's 'new sense' of the term 'literal meaning' is not quite as new as it might seem from his account. It is one more development in the radical fluctuation of the 'literal' sense since the Middle

²⁶ See, e.g., Cassirer 1971 (prior version 1944) and, among a host of 'New Critical' discussions, Ransom 1971 (prior version 1941).

²⁷ See Frye 1957, p. 89; see pp. 71-128 for the larger discussion. Compare Frye 1974 (prior version 1965), pp. 12-13.

Ages. In the Reformation, an interpreter treating what was once considered allegorical as a condition of the 'literal' sense might claim that there is nothing 'beyond' that normative sense. In the Romantic period, a theorist treating the idea as a dimension of the image might claim that the 'symbol' points to nothing 'beyond' itself. Frye's argument that poetic images do not 'point' to anything except themselves depends not only upon the 'New Criticism' that he explicitly acknowledges, but upon the Romantic theory that underlies such criticism. Yet Frye's 'literal' sense is at once more constricted to words than the Romantic 'symbol' and at the same time more open to interpretation. In fact, while Romantic theory tended frequently to treat the 'allegorical' as a kind of literature contrasted with 'symbolic' writing, Frye treats it in part as the process of commentary on literature, interpreting what is 'implicit' in the literal sense. The 'allegorical' act that had once been secondary to works of 'imagination' develops into the primary source of the autonomy of 'criticism.' It is no wonder that for Frye 'all' commentary is 'allegorical'; the only 'apparent' sense is as it were a transcript of the text. A poem 'cannot be literally anything but a poem' (p. 77). Having radically restricted the 'literal' sense to the words of the poem, he treats the 'allegorical' as anything else that is said about it. In the process, the polemic against speaking 'otherwise' that had developed from the late Middle Ages and the Reformation to the Romantic period turns into a popularization of speaking 'otherwise' in the modern period. And the more the 'integrity' of 'verbal structure' to which Frye appeals is itself challenged in this period, the more 'allegory' turns into a way not only to comment upon the text, but to construct it.

These reflections about a contemporary critical argument do not 'prove' or 'disprove' the argument. They rather suggest the critical importance of situating the very definitions of terms like 'literal' and 'allegorical' in the context of changing intellectual and polemical conditions. To analyze such conditions systematically it would be necessary to examine transitions not only in the theory of allegory but in its practice from antiquity to the modern period. Such an analysis would need to assess the far-reaching historical changes—linguistic, imaginative, ideological, institutional—that promote or constrain the realignment of specific texts with shifting interpretive communities. Questions central to such an investigation would include the following: By what criteria (for example, grammatical, generic, doctrinal, social) does an interpretive community assess the 'literal' sense of a

given text? Insofar as a community accepts the 'literal' sense, what forms (for example, intellectual assent, ritual orientation, legal obligation) does its acceptance take? In the process of 'allegorization,' which dimensions of a text are selected or rejected, foregrounded or backgrounded, and which features of the text resist such allegorization? At what point does an allegorization become so radical that it breaks down a previous cultural consensus and promotes a new interpretive community? Given the tendency for allegorized *texts* to remain canonical while allegorical *interpretations* pass out of currency, what continuities of idiom and orientation underlie historical change?

No single study, however expansive, could fully coordinate such wide-ranging developments. The questions themselves are still beginning to be asked. Even the most ambitious and valuable projects of recent years, like the festschrift for Friedrich Ohly edited by Hans Fromm, Wolfgang Harms, and Uwe Ruberg, *Verbum et Signum* (1975), the collection of essays edited by Walter Haug in *Formen und Funktionen der Allegorie* (1979), the conceptual and bibliographical survey in Hennig Brinkmann's *Mittelalterliche Hermeneutik* (1980), and Jean Pépin's retrospective anthology in *La tradition de l'allégorie de Philon d'Alexandrie à Dante* (1987), at times tend less to engage questions of this kind than to provide rich scholarly resources with which to conduct such an investigation.²⁸ Nor would the investigation itself be likely to yield a semiotic 'model' of interpretive strategies. There are irreducible differences not only in the historical settings in which interpretation takes place, but in the very status of diverse texts (sacred, legendary, recreational, prescriptive) for different individuals and communities.

In any case, the present volume does not aim to offer such a model, much less a 'history' of interpretation and allegory during a period of over two thousand years. Investigating major interpretive turning points in differing but overlapping cultures, it aims rather to provide a set of case studies of interacting critical drives and their relation to historical change. The subjects of the interpretive movements it examines include primal forms of mythology, conceived in terms ranging from ancient logic to Romantic poetics; foundational texts sacred respectively to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; and critical categories of visual and verbal art, among them the hieroglyph, the emblem, the symbol, and irony. The tensions discussed in the

²⁸ See, e.g., the review of *La tradition* in Whitman 1993b.

work involve conceptual encounters between figures central to prominent interpretive schools, among them Philo and Origen, Paul and Augustine, R. Akiva and R. Ishmael, Porphyry and Proclus, Avicenna and Averroes, Maimonides and Rashba, Nahmanides and Abulafia, Abelard and William of Conches, Bonaventure and Nicholas of Lyra, Dante and Boccaccio, Alciato and Valeriano, Bacon and Vico, Goethe and Schlegel, Benjamin and Freud, de Man and Jameson, and a host of others. The implications of such encounters extend far beyond the margins of individual texts; they concern the intellectual, communal, and spiritual complexions of diverse civilizations.

The volume has developed from a cooperative project based in Jerusalem with contributions of scholars from a number of different countries and disciplines. The academic specialties of these contributors range from ancient and modern literatures to comparative religion, art history, and the history of philosophy. The essays they have provided themselves both differ and overlap in their theoretical assumptions and practical attitudes. It is hoped that the differences, no less than the agreements, will contribute to the understanding of how earlier interpreters, from other places and times, have understood the works and worlds that they engage. The format of the volume, with its extensive cross-references, is designed to encourage such comparisons and contrasts.

It is easy enough to imagine other analyses or alternative structures for a study of this kind. Such a study might well devote greater attention, for example, to a number of subjects of allegorical interpretation in particular periods (e.g., the natural world in early medieval commentary);²⁹ a variety of critical methods partially related to allegorical procedures (e.g., 'etymological' interpretation);³⁰ a range of imaginative forms that overlap with interpretive allegory (e.g., the parable);³¹ and a multitude of developments in the approaches that it does consider (e.g., typology after the Reformation).³² More generally, such a study might include other categories of inquiry, or proceed along different theoretical lines, or . . . But it might be best for me to end this particular reverie for the moment, lest I continue

²⁹ For overviews, see, e.g., Brinkmann 1980 and Ladner 1995 (prior version 1992).

³⁰ See, e.g., Klinck 1970, qualified by Grubmüller 1975.

³¹ See, e.g., Klauck 1986 (prior version 1978); Stern 1991; Wailes 1987.

³² See, e.g., Miner 1977; Lewalski 1979; Frei 1974; Prickett 1991; Bercovitch 1972.

with the reflection—to adapt the phrase of another writer—that in this work ‘there are so many things lacking that, if there lacked one thing more, there would not be any room for it.’³³

For the history of allegorical interpretation has a way of both fascinating and eluding its interpreters, whether they try to keep their distance from it or try to approach it. History—or is it allegory?—has taken its revenge upon the very Luther who proclaimed his independence from ‘allegorical’ interpretation and his commitment to one ‘literal’ sense. It has been observed that contemporary scholarship seeking the meaning of Luther’s work has found more than one ‘Luther’—the figure of inner psychic tensions, the figure of emerging class interests, the figure of diverse social audiences, and so forth.³⁴ Luther might have responded that he was not a character in Christian Scripture, but would he have been pleased at this apparent division of his ‘literal’ sense? It will be protested, of course, that this is not ‘allegory,’ not the kind of radical displacement whereby even a story like Jupiter assaulting Danae in a golden shower can be interpreted in the Renaissance as the winning of a woman with money.³⁵ And then the protester might calmly enter a classroom to inform a group of students that *Hamlet* is a drama of Oedipal frustration and *Paradise Lost* an epic of incipient capitalism.

An ‘insane’ activity, the ‘refuge of unskillfulness,’ that Protestant scholar in the seventeenth century called a range of allegorical interpretation, in a comment cited at the beginning of this essay. In retrospect, perhaps he was not completely right. But even if he was, perhaps one way for future interpreters to keep their sanity would be to deepen the study of that activity. It is hoped that the present study will be a retrospective forward of that kind.

³³ See the quotation from Macedonio Fernandez in Eco 1992, p. 40; I have substituted the word ‘work’ for the original word ‘world.’

³⁴ See Steinmetz 1986, p. 75.

³⁵ See Thomas Wilson (sixteenth century), cited by Sinfield 1984, p. 127; compare Isidore of Seville (sixth century), cited by Allen 1970, p. 212.

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This is a list of works specifically cited in the essay, not a general bibliography. With regard to early sources, the list includes only works cited in specific printings (e.g., Philo's *De Plantatione* in the translation of Colson and Whitaker), not works more broadly designated (e.g., Virgil's *Aeneid*).

In this list and in the essay itself, the citation of a 'prior version' of a book or an article is an attempt to indicate the date of its earliest (or at least an important earlier) edition or publication, despite differences between initial and later forms of publication. If the work is translated, such a citation refers to the date of its earliest publication (to the extent of my knowledge) in its original language. Thus, the date of the 'prior version' of Auerbach's "Figura" in German is not 1944 (the often-cited date of its appearance in *Neue Dantestudien*), but 1938 (the date of its appearance in *Archivum Romanicum*).

Since even the earliest 'edition' of a work may include material previously published in another form, the citation of a work (including a 'prior version'), of course, does not necessarily indicate the date when a particular argument 'originally' appears. Thus, though the 'prior version' of Chenu's *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century* (1968) is the 1957 French work on which the English translation is based, the French work itself includes material from several previous articles by Chenu. To try to specify the 'original' form of a scholarly argument leads potentially to a nearly infinite regress; the publication dates in this list only demarcate important stages in the public presentation of such arguments.

Normally, 'prior versions' are cited only for scholarly studies of recent generations, not for early primary sources that may antedate their later forms of publication by centuries.

In the designation of a study in a number of a series for which the copyright date differs by no more than one year from the 'official' year of the series number, the only year cited is the 'official' one.

In the citation of multiple studies by a single author, each entry is preceded by a brief code with the last name of the author (or a line indicating the repetition of that name) and the date of the work (in the most recent 'edition' specified in the full citation); such entries are arranged according to the order of those dates (e.g., Scholem 1954; — 1965).

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PART ONE

ANTIQUITY TO THE
LATE MIDDLE AGES

**PRESENT PERSPECTIVES:
ANTIQUITY TO THE LATE MIDDLE AGES**

Jon Whitman

- A. Antique interpretation of formative texts: 'units' of analysis*
 - i. Ancient Homeric interpretation*
 - ii. Alexandrian allegorization of Jewish Scripture*
 - iii. Rabbinic interpretation in its midrashic forms*
 - iv. Early Christian typology*
- B. Medieval philosophic designs: 'textures' of interpretation*
 - v. Philosophic modes in medieval Islam*
 - vi. Jewish approaches to philosophic allegory*
 - vii. Christian allegorization of ancient philosophic writing*
 - viii. Philosophic attitudes toward signification in Christian Scripture*

Writing a letter that was longer than he wished, Pascal argued that if there had been more time, he could have made the letter shorter.¹ Some such thought has occurred to me more than once in writing this account of 'present perspectives' toward allegory, although admittedly the additional time I would like would be measured not in days, but in decades. Whereas the previous chapter offered a brief outline of scholarship ending over thirty years ago (in the mid-1960s), I would not want to hazard such a composite outline for scholarship ranging from that time to the present. Instead, in this chapter on recent approaches to allegory from antiquity to the late Middle Ages (and in chapter 12, on recent approaches to the subject from the late Middle Ages to the modern period), I would like only to offer a few reflections about some of the diverse tendencies of research on allegory and interpretation during the past few decades.

¹ For the principles of annotation in this chapter (as in chapter 1), including references to times of publication and 'prior versions' of recent studies, see the introductory note to 'Works Cited' at the end of chapter 1. For Pascal's comment, see Pascal (1967 edition), sixteenth letter, p. 233.

While it would be possible to organize this material in many ways, perhaps it would be appropriate in these two chapters to concentrate on a number of broad developments briefly mentioned in the general introduction—changes in the conventional notions of allegory as ‘imposed,’ ‘abstract,’ ‘closed,’ and ‘ahistorical.’ My account recalls each of these four notions in turn as it considers four historical periods in the movement of allegory. (A more detailed analysis would assess the treatment of all four notions for all of these historical periods.) In view of the conceptual and historical fluidity of the term ‘allegory,’² my remarks specifically extend to a number of interpretive movements in which the degree of overlap with allegorical interpretation remains subject to controversy. The discussion is thus divided according to the four principal divisions of this volume, and broadly subdivided according to subjects treated in the individual essays within each of these four divisions.

It should be stressed that my comments are neither overviews of the essays themselves nor surveys of all important recent scholarship in the field. Nor, of course, do they aim to treat each of the manifold interpretive problems in a given period or to provide a ‘history’ of interpretive allegory at large.³ They are rather restricted efforts to specify, coordinate, and assess some contemporary perspectives on the general subjects to which each essay makes its own distinct contribution. In strictly limiting each section of this chapter and its later counterpart (chapter 12) to no more than a couple of extended ‘paragraphs,’ I have reluctantly omitted much that I would have liked to include. But my hope was to write a ‘shorter’ letter rather than a longer one.

A. Antique interpretation of formative texts: ‘units’ of analysis

Over a generation ago it was common to treat allegory as interpretation ‘imposed’ on a text. But in recent years it has become common to ask: what is meant by the ‘text’? Theoretical questions about how texts are ‘constituted’ with the ‘intervention’ of readers

² See chapter 1 above and my discussion with references in the notes in this chapter and chapter 12 below.

³ On the theoretical and practical problems of such a project, see chapter 1 above.

have preoccupied critical movements such as contemporary 'hermeneutics,' 'reader response' criticism, and 'deconstruction.' Such movements, which have already produced a voluminous literature of their own, necessarily influence critical discussions today,⁴ including some (like my own) with substantial reservations about particular 'schools.' But I would like to pose briefly a more 'practical' problem that confronts interpreters since antiquity. What constitutes the 'unit' of writing that is to be analyzed?

Since any delineation of 'units' of writing implies an attitude toward structures of meaning, the way a critical movement responds to this question can help to shape its whole character. At the risk of reducing an enormously complex issue to a sketch, perhaps I could outline for the moment four diverse but overlapping approaches to this question in late antiquity. In one approach, the text (e.g., Homer's *Iliad*) is analyzed according to a 'logical' structure. The more ambitious the logical structure, the more the 'unit' of analysis tends to be the text as a whole. In another approach, the text (e.g., Jewish Scripture) is demarcated not only in logical, but in 'legal' or even 'psychological' terms. At least in part, its 'units' of analysis depend on the forms of behavior that the text promotes. In still another approach, individual words or verses are the 'units' of analysis. A particular 'verbal' unit is linked by narrative interpolations (e.g., midrashic accounts) of the interpretive community to some other word or verse. In yet another approach, the original text is a provisional work (e.g., an 'old' testament) that requires the addition of a separate composition (a 'new' testament) to constitute a whole. In this case the 'unit' of analysis is 'typological' in character. These are not the only approaches to 'units' of analysis, of course, and I want to stress that these four categories themselves are not 'pure' classifications. But perhaps they can provide an entry into the historically shifting relation between text and interpretation in late antiquity.

i. Ancient Homeric interpretation: the 'logic' of the text

From its early stages, Greek allegory seeks to specify an underlying 'logic' (*logos*) for various passages of a story (*mythos*). The extension of that *logos* to a 'whole' text, however, is a very tenuous and late

⁴ With regard to critical discussions of allegory, see, e.g., the references above in chapter 1, n. 15.

development in polytheist interpretation.⁵ An early Greek allegorist, for example, might argue that Homer's account of Zeus dangling Hera with two anvils on her feet (*Iliad* 15) signifies the suspension of air (Hera) between the ethereal element (Zeus) and the heavier elements of water and earth. But even in the late Hellenistic period, Stoic interpreters tend to relate such passages less to the poem at large than to the structures of thought that the passages are supposed to reflect.⁶ In the first century C.E. or slightly later, the more versatile allegorizer Heraclitus broadly follows the narrative sequence of passages in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and he sometimes interprets with a certain sensitivity to literary nuance. His approach to textual continuity is largely episodic, however, and his treatment of conceptual significance is shifting and eclectic.⁷ It seems that the notion of giving systematic 'significance' to a 'whole' text (e.g., Homer's *Iliad* or Plato's *Republic*) emerges seriously in polytheist interpretation only in Neoplatonic allegory from the third to the fifth centuries C.E. When it does, the 'unity' of the text reflects a Neoplatonic ideology of 'organic' order, according to which even the most partial phenomenon of a well-formed composition (and of the cosmos as a whole) is a 'symbol' (*symbolon*) of the One from which all phenomena 'proceed.'⁸

While such interpretation seems a conspicuous case of 'imposing' an ideology on a text, Robert Lamberton's essay in chapter 3 suggests its subtler conception, the effort to show how the logic (*logos*) attributed to a text is implied in the text's own language (*logos*). Perhaps the point can be briefly illustrated by a Neoplatonic contrast with the old allegory of Hera. For the fifth-century commentator Proclus, Homer's account of Zeus casting Hephaestus from Olympus

⁵ See Lamberton 1992 and Robert Lamberton's essay below in chapter 3 of this volume.

⁶ See Lamberton 1992 and Long 1992. Long's effort to separate Stoic interpretation from 'allegory,' however, is a more defensive and less convincing feature of his essay. Aspects of his argument that seem to me historically and/or theoretically questionable include claims that allegory apparently requires a 'narrative' format (p. 54) and a consistent pattern of transfer (p. 60); attempts to deny that certain radical forms of etymological transfiguration and demythologization are 'allegorical' (e.g., pp. 62–4); and the strained treatment of ancient testimony that complicates his case (e.g., pp. 49–50, 58–9, 63–4). The essay nonetheless remains valuable.

⁷ See Heraclitus (1962 edition), especially Buffière's comments on pp. xx–xxi and xxvii–xxix, and Whitman 1987a, pp. 38–40; compare Dawson 1992, pp. 38–52.

⁸ On late antique Neoplatonic allegory, see Buffière 1956, esp. pp. 393–7, 411–59, 521–58; Pépin 1987, pp. 57–80 (prior version of essay 1966); Coulter 1976; Dillon 1976; Sheppard 1980; Trimpf 1983, esp. pp. 164–200; Whitman 1987a, pp. 91–8; Lamberton 1986 and 1992.

(*Iliad* 1) signifies cosmic procession from the One. But Proclus does not just allegorize the passage; he tries to explain how the strange, 'grotesque' (*teratologion*) expression of such 'symbols' (*symbola*) in Homer's text suggests a coherent compositional and cosmic order.⁹ For him the fact that the passage is stylistically wayward *exemplifies* that very deflection from the One which the passage itself evokes. From this perspective, the logic of the 'runaway' text is inseparable from its semiotic; its idea is implicated with its very idiom. Recent work by James A. Coulter (1976), Anne D.R. Sheppard (1980), Wesley Trimpi (1983), Robert Lamberton (1986), and A.A. Long (1992) has suggested how ancient Greek interpretive procedures are not necessarily more alien in design than influential critical approaches from the Romantic period to the present, including organicism, symbol theory, and structuralism.¹⁰ The point is not that such antique procedures are identical with modern approaches in method, aim, and scope; they are not. But in displaying the turns of thought by which 'advanced' Greek commentators seek to reconstruct their own sources, they already anticipate much later attempts to coordinate the frameworks of 'current' logic with the forms of ancient language.

ii. *Alexandrian allegorization of Jewish Scripture: the orientations of the Law*

For another critical community in antiquity, a way of reading is inseparable from a way of living. The Scripture of the Jews is not only a story of events or a system of 'logic'; it is a code of conduct. Accordingly, Jewish commentary on Scripture tends to treat 'units' of analysis as not only narrative or conceptual, but also behavioral in character. This tendency takes diverse forms, ranging from the intricate legal and ethical analyses of the 'Oral Torah' to more broadly psychological readings of Scripture as a way of realigning the spirit. Such investigations of Scripture display considerable overlap—and sometimes conspicuous tension—with other forms of speculation in

⁹ For Proclus on the fall of Hephaestus, the 'grotesque,' and *symbola*, see the citations in Coulter 1976, pp. 50, 53–4, 136–8, with Lamberton 1986, pp. 204–05. 'Thus they relate, / Erring,' Milton would severely remark about this tale over a millennium later, protesting for his own reasons; see *Paradise Lost*, Book I, ll. 746–7, in Milton (1968 edition).

¹⁰ For 'organicism' and 'symbol' theory, see esp. Coulter 1976 and Trimpi 1983; for 'structuralism,' see esp. Sheppard, p. 161, and Lamberton 1986, p. 201. On earlier Stoic interpretation as a form of 'cultural anthropology,' see Long 1992.

antiquity.¹¹ In the Hellenistic setting of ancient Alexandria, for example, where the Hebrew term *Torah* ('teaching') is rendered into Greek as *nomos* ('law'),¹² there are far-reaching efforts to align the provisions of biblical law with the principles of Greek philosophy. Already in the second century B.C.E., an Alexandrian Jewish interpreter can associate the rest-giving Sabbath with the knowledge-giving *logos*.¹³ Though the fragmentary remains of Alexandrian exegesis make it difficult to trace its precise transactions with scriptural law and Greek logic,¹⁴ it is at least possible to appreciate some of its tensions in the surviving allegorical commentary of Philo of Alexandria, living at the turn of the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E.

Whereas a generation ago Philo was frequently treated as a 'philosopher' who incongruously projects his Greek ideas about the cosmos and the soul onto Jewish Scripture, in the current generation, especially since the influential work of V. Nikiprowetzky (1977 [prior version 1974], 1983), he has been increasingly considered an 'exegete' who broadly proceeds according to the development of the scriptural text. Yet Philo so often conspicuously digresses from one reference point to another that the principles by which he demarcates and orders the text do not seem to follow simply either a 'logical' or a narratological plan.¹⁵ While no single rationale or method determines his diverse procedures,¹⁶ it is revealing that for him not only

¹¹ Since mid-twentieth-century studies such as Daube 1949 and 1953 and Lieberman 1962 (prior version 1950), scholarship has increasingly qualified strict distinctions between rabbinic and 'Hellenistic' interpretation; see, e.g., Borgen 1984, pp. 123–6, 132–8, 148–50, 153–4; Mack 1984b; Instone Brewer 1992, pp. 199–205, 210–12, 217, 220–1; and Cohen 1995, pp. 1–32. Nonetheless, differences in interpretive orientation should not be minimized; see, e.g., Sandmel 1971 (prior version 1954–5), pp. 1–29, and Sandmel 1984, pp. 31–6; Instone Brewer 1992, pp. 223–5; and my remarks below.

¹² For reassessments in recent decades of the implications of this development, see Remus 1984 and Segal 1984.

¹³ See the comments on Aristobulus in Winston 1986, pp. 205–06, and Dawson 1992, pp. 79–81, with the differing assessments in Dawson's n. 21, pp. 271–2.

¹⁴ For some perspectives, see Borgen 1984; Mack 1984b; and Runia 1990 (prior version 1989).

¹⁵ See Runia 1984, esp. pp. 230, 233, 238–9, 245, and Runia 1987, esp. pp. 121–2, 124, 130; compare Nikiprowetzky 1977 (prior version 1974), 1983; Winston 1981, pp. 2–7; Dillon 1983, 1994; and Wan 1993.

¹⁶ If his commentaries tend to be more textually 'concatenated' than the rhetorical exercises of the Hellenistic schools (considered by Mack 1984a), for example, they yet tend to be more deliberately 'framed' than extant forms of early rabbinic midrash; see Runia 1987, pp. 119–20, and Fraade 1991, pp. 7–18, with the discussion of midrash in the following section of this chapter (iii).

the legislative portions of Scripture, but also its narrative passages, are delineations of divine *nomos*—the cosmic and psychic norms to which the text gives expression.¹⁷ With such an approach to the law, it is exegetically 'legitimate' to turn from an account in Genesis (4:3) about Cain offering 'fruits' to God, to the injunction in Exodus (23:19) to offer more specifically 'first-fruits,' to the elaboration in Leviticus (2:14) about particular forms of 'first-fruits'—themselves elaborately allegorized as aspects of careful deliberation distinguishing the first 'offspring' of the soul—before returning to Genesis (4:4) to endorse Abel's offering of the 'firstlings' of his flock.¹⁸ In interpretation of this kind, rethinking the law is itself a means of reorienting and regulating the soul. Given such passages, a number of recent commentators have suggested that Philo's manner of interpretation is less a way of systematizing Scripture than a way of meditating upon it, reflecting upon the text so that it can reshape his thoughts and the thoughts of his readers in turn.¹⁹ Whatever the interior orientation of his exegesis, there is more than one sense in which Philo's approach to the spirit of Scripture involves a continual engagement with the 'letter' of the law.²⁰ As David Dawson points out in chapter 4 of this volume, Philo turns the very notion of the 'body' of

¹⁷ See, e.g., his argument (*De Abrahamo* 4–5, pp. 6–7 in the translation of Colson [1935]) that before the scriptural laws take written form, the patriarchs themselves are 'laws endowed with life and reason' (*empsychoi kai logikoi nomoi*), with related passages in *De Opificio Mundi* 3; *De Migratione Abrahami* 128–31; *De Abrahamo* 276; and *De Vita Mosis* I, 162, and II, 4 and 48. Compare his more general argument (surveyed by Sandmel 1984, pp. 16–22) that the composite story of the patriarchs exemplifies the operation of the well-regulated soul. Much of the tension in Philo's treatment of Scripture results from his effort to correlate the 'law' (*nomos*) of Moses (in both 'legislative' and 'narrative' terms) with the 'law of nature' (*nomos physeōs*) and 'right reason' (*orthos logos*) in Greek speculation. On this general tension and on the more specific notion of individuals as 'living laws' in Greek and Roman thought, see Wolfson 1947, II, pp. 165–200; Sandmel 1984, pp. 16–22; Remus 1984, pp. 12–16; Segal 1984; and Colish 1985, I, pp. 36, 91–104.

¹⁸ See *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 52–88, pp. 132–61 in the translation of Colson and Whitaker (1929); the text of 'Scripture' here is of course Greek. The passages cited above are only a few reference points in a far more intricate argument.

¹⁹ For suggestions of such a process from different critical perspectives, see, for example, Cazeaux 1983 (e.g., pp. 85–6, 248–52, 347–8) and Cazeaux 1989; Bruns 1984, pp. 150–2; Mack 1984a, p. 112; Fraade 1991, pp. 7–12; compare Winston 1986, pp. 223–6; Hay 1991; Instone Brewer 1992, pp. 208–09. For a forceful critique of Cazeaux's treatment (1983), see Runia 1984, pp. 211–26, though the more general remarks in Runia 1987, pp. 129–30, on 'experiential' approaches to Philo seem to me to underestimate the degree to which Philonic teaching may imply not only making an argument, but moving the soul.

²⁰ See Fraade 1991, pp. 11–12.

the text from a linguistic to a behavioral context, a concern for the performance of Jewish law.²¹ From such a perspective, that which ‘embodies’ the meaning of Scripture is not just a set of words, but a structure of life.

iii. Rabbinic interpretation in its midrashic forms: the configurations of words

The Jewish community of the Land of Israel conducts its own negotiations with the law. During the early centuries C.E., the very rabbinical scholars who delineate the categories of Jewish law, or *halakhah*, also develop the Jewish ‘lore’ of *aggadah*—the ‘telling,’ or retelling, of Scripture.²² In the forms of aggadic activity called ‘midrash’ (‘seeking out’ or ‘inquiring into’ Scripture), the critical ‘units’ of analysis are normally not tales or episodes, but individual verses and words, often radically removed from their immediate contexts. Midrash shapes and reshapes these verbal units into constantly changing configurations of its own—linking the sounds and syntax of widely separated passages, juxtaposing characters from divergent settings and times, developing brief figures of speech into broad frames of thought.²³ In recent years, studies by James L. Kugel (1983, 1990), David Stern (1988, 1991), Daniel Boyarin (1990), Stephen D. Fraade (1991), and others, along with critical anthologies by Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick (1986) and Michael Fishbane (1993), have helped to acquaint a large audience with the virtuosity and vividness of the

²¹ Compare the broader argument in Dawson 1992, pp. 118–24; Mendelson 1988, pp. 22–8, 51–75; Weiss 1991; Hay 1994, pp. 66–7.

²² The studies of I. Heinemann 1970 (prior version 1949), Geza Vermes 1973 (prior version 1961), J. Heinemann 1974, and Jonah Fraenkel 1991 are basic investigations from diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives. For brief introductions, see, e.g., J. Heinemann 1986 (prior version 1974), Kugel 1983, and Goldin 1986, 1988.

²³ Views about whether or not midrash is ‘allegorical’ depend on which aspects of midrash are examined and on how broadly ‘allegory’ is defined; see, e.g., H.A. Wolfson 1970 (prior version 1956), pp. 37–43; Bruns 1987; Boyarin 1990, pp. 20, 107–10; Fraenkel 1991, pp. 197–232, 323–93; D. Stern 1991, pp. 9–16, 49–50. For a revealing example of the historical fluidity of such definitions, see the humanist scholar Hugo Grotius, who in the seventeenth century associates signification ‘qui *midrash* [in Hebrew characters] dicitur’ and the *verba duplicata* noted by ‘Mosi Maimonidae’ with a form of signification that Paul in the first century calls ‘allegorical’ (in a participial form of the term; Galatians 4:24) and that scholars in the twentieth century frequently call ‘typological’! See *Annotata in epistolam d. Pauli ad Galatas*, column 67, in Pearson et al. 1698, vol. 7, and compare the remarks on allegory, typology, and Maimonides later in this chapter (iv and vi), with the accompanying annotation.

midrashic imagination. Though the perspectives of these studies are diverse, the general application of contemporary critical categories to ancient midrash has frequently encouraged its affiliation with theories of an 'indeterminate' text developing 'intertextually' and 'dialogically'.²⁴ The argument at times has its point, although a strong case can be made that midrashic practice tends to be at once more fanciful and more sacred in orientation than such recent theories. Inserting into the text a dazzling array of legends and comments—historical, grammatical, intellectual, playful, polemical—midrash brings into the original revelation the continuing 'revelations' of its readers. The fact that these later revelations sometimes require exegesis in their own right only confirms the sense that the Oral Torah is coextensive with the Written Torah itself.²⁵ As Marc Hirshman argues in chapter 5 of this volume, even as midrash pointedly diverges from the written text, it aims in that act to converge with the divine author. In this regard, an increasing number of investigators in recent years have stressed the performative function of midrash in the activity of an 'inquiring' community after the destruction of the Second Temple. From such a viewpoint, midrash is less an 'exposition' of the text or an 'imposition' upon it than a kind of interposition between the words of Scripture, as rabbinical leaders and their students restlessly position and reposition themselves in relation to their own Covenant.²⁶

iv. Early Christian typology: the ends of the canon

The way in which a community structures a formative text, then, can expose not only the form of inquiry, but the institutional character of the interpretive community itself. As the Christian community develops in the early centuries C.E., for example, it seeks to align Jewish Scripture not only with an extended commentary, but with a subsequent narrative, treated as a 'New' Testament that fulfills the 'Old' one. From this perspective, scriptural 'units' of analysis are

²⁴ It should be noted that not every one of the works cited argues along these lines and that there are sometimes reservations about such arguments even in those works which broadly support them.

²⁵ See Jaffee 1983, pp. 106–07.

²⁶ On interposition, see D. Stern 1986, pp. 121–2. On community and Covenant, see Fraade 1991; Bruns 1992, pp. 104–23 (prior version of essay 1989); Fisch 1993, p. 500.

composite, implicating the provisional 'figures' or 'types' of the earlier Testament with their counterparts in the later one. In the end, such figural or typological interpretation is an effort to display not only 'units' of meaning, but the underlying 'unity' of the composite canon and the Church that authorizes it.

Typology, however, is not only an argument for the integrity of a canon or a community. It is also an argument for the integrity of history, attributing order not just to episodes in a text, but to events in time.²⁷ In fact, studies of ancient interpretation by Auerbach, Daniélou, de Lubac, and others over a generation ago frequently tended to treat Christian typology as a uniquely effective way to develop a form of conceptual transfer while preserving a sense of continuous history.²⁸ More recent research, which includes analyses of typological strains in both Christian and non-Christian writing,²⁹ has exposed some of the deep problems in this approach. It has been increasingly shown how the Church's typological stress on a redemptive new era repeatedly puts it in radical tension with the 'old' era and its 'Old' Testament³⁰—a tension discussed by Paula Fredriksen in chapter 6 of this volume. It has been pointed out how the status of history itself conspicuously fluctuates in early Christian interpretation, which often mixes 'historical' figures with 'imaginative' ones.³¹ And it has been observed how the typological sense of

²⁷ For overviews with bibliography, see Whitman 1987a, pp. 65–8, 77–83, and Whitman 1991, pp. 161–6.

²⁸ See, e.g., Auerbach 1959 (prior version 1938), Daniélou 1960 (prior version 1950), and de Lubac 1959–64.

²⁹ Long before the current generation, of course, there are discussions comparing Jewish and sectarian forms of 'typology' with Christian ones; see, e.g., H.A. Wolfson 1970 (prior version 1956), pp. 26–9, 38–45. For more recent assessments, see, e.g., Kugel 1986, pp. 34–9, 44–51, 79–81; compare Daube 1980; Hirshman 1988, pp. 158–60; Talmadge 1986, p. 314; and Instone Brewer 1992, pp. 194–5. For 'typology' in Virgilian epic, see Horbury 1988, p. 766; Shapiro 1993, p. 408.

³⁰ The vast critical literature on this persistent tension in its religious, imaginative, and social forms includes particular ironies for certain claims about historical continuity in typology. To cite only one case in point (largely theological) from many examples, in recent years it has been argued that Origen (often regarded as a radical 'allegorist'), with his conception of recurring patterns in the process of redemption, assigns a perpetual value to the Jewish dimension of history far surpassing its role for Augustine, with his sense of a programmatic temporal movement to a Christian order; see Gorday 1983. On some of the acute ironies, ambiguities, and problems of the 'old'/'new' paradigm in medieval Christian literature, see Whitman 1993b and Whitman 1999 with the references in the notes.

³¹ For different aspects of this overlap between 'historical' and 'imaginative' figuration in antiquity and the Middle Ages, see Hellgardt 1978; Haug 1997 (prior

moving forward regularly implies the converse notion of reading backward—a retrospective application of later ‘fulfillments’ to earlier figures.³² By the Reformation, the influential educator Philip Melancthon will explicitly recommend that the student approaching Christian Scripture begin with the New Testament letters of Paul and leave ‘historical’ sections of the ‘Old’ Testament for last.³³ From a Jewish perspective, of course, such a reading is an extreme imposition upon its own Scripture. For many Christians early and late, however, transposing that Scripture into another framework is the only way the text ‘makes sense.’ In many respects, the broad question of how a text makes ‘sense’ has increasingly come to mark the contemporary study of typology. That study has suggested how deeply ‘units’ of meaning depend upon the shape of a canon, and more broadly, upon the ‘hermeneutic circle’ in which a preconception of the whole pervades the perception of every part.³⁴ But Christian typology gives

version 1985), pp. 97–8, 223–7; Whitman 1987a, pp. 77–89, 127–30; Whitman 1993a, p. 33; and Emmerson 1992; for related problems in ancient and medieval historiography, see Momigliano 1966, pp. 127–42 (prior version of essay 1958) and 211–20 (prior version of essay 1961–2); Momigliano 1990, pp. 29–53; and Morse 1991. Compare Young 1989 and 1997, esp. pp. 161–213, on the frequent tendency in even the school of Antioch (long associated with forms of ‘historical’ and ‘typological’ interpretation) to emphasize not ‘historicity,’ but the ‘narrative logic’ of a text, and see Theodore of Mopsuestia (trans. and ed. Froelich 1984, p. 103) on Paul ‘inventing’ events in the critical case of Galatians 4:21–4:31. Such complications pass beyond the specific problems of terminology and thought in Galatians 4:24, where a form of signification frequently considered by twentieth-century scholars ‘typological’ is called by Paul himself ‘allegorical’ (in a participial form of the term). On the question of Paul’s language here, already problematic in ancient Christianity for Chrysostom and Jerome, see de Lubac 1947; Freytag 1975, pp. 30–7; Pépin 1976 (not in prior version of 1958), pp. 490–7; and Whitman 1991, pp. 162–6; compare n. 23 above.

³² For this tendency in Paul, see Whitman 1991, pp. 162–6; for Irenaeus, see Pépin 1987, p. 21 (prior version of essay 1966), and Bruns 1987, p. 643; for Origen and Augustine, see Bruns 1984, pp. 155–61. On converse (and converted) movements of mind when ‘typology’ is largely displaced after the Reformation, see the later retrospective constructions of ‘biblical theology’ and ‘hermeneutics,’ discussed by von Rad 1963, pp. 32–8; Frei 1974, 1986; and Gillespie 1986.

³³ For ‘reading backward’ in the Middle Ages, see, e.g., the discussion of Hugh of St. Victor in Preus 1969, pp. 31–4, and Emmerson 1992, pp. 12, 23–4, 28–9. For Melancthon and some of his contexts, see Friedman 1983, pp. 129–30.

³⁴ On canon formation and the hermeneutic circle, see, e.g., Kermode 1986; Bruns 1987 and 1992; Young 1997, esp. pp. 7–45, 117–39, 285–99; and Greene-McCreight 1999. The point is not that contemporary notions of canon formation and hermeneutics wholly account for Christian typology. Indeed, it can be argued in reverse that the centuries-old practice of Christian typology helps to account for central notions of contemporary hermeneutics.

its own turn to the hermeneutic circle. Designed to evoke the 'whole' of history, its 'units of analysis' are finally 'teleological' in character,³⁵ implicating the 'end' of the text with the end of time itself.

* * *

It should be stressed that such diverse approaches to 'units' of analysis partially overlap with each other, not only in antiquity, but also in later periods. While the 'logic' of ancient Homeric interpretation differs from the 'verbal' configurations of rabbinic exegesis, for example, midrashic interpretation has cogent designs of its own.³⁶ And while the 'behavioral' dimension of Philonic commentary is not the same as a 'typological' orientation toward the scriptural canon, typology has intensely personal implications in turn.³⁷ It should also be stressed that other attitudes toward 'units' of analysis develop both during and after antiquity. A more extensive discussion might indicate, for example, how the interpretive effort to find meaning in every element of Scripture promotes in the late Middle Ages a tendency to focus not only on individual scriptural words and verses, as in midrash, but on the very letters of the divine text, as in Kabbalah. Conversely, such a discussion might suggest how the attempt of late medieval and early Renaissance mythography to systematize a vast array of divergent stories eventually encourages it to pass beyond the 'logical' analysis of a 'whole' text to the 'genealogical' alignment of gods and goddesses from various texts in a coherent 'history' of their own.³⁸ Such complex developments deserve full-scale analyses. The preceding sketch of selected movements in antique interpretation aims only to suggest the contemporary tendency to stress that the form of a 'formative' text changes historically with the structures applied to it—among them, 'logical,' 'behavioral,' 'verbal,' and 'typological' ones. This is not to say that such texts are wholly shaped by those who interpret them. For scriptural and mythological texts themselves significantly shape the interpreters who engage

³⁵ Since the teleological movement in this design is not complete until the end of time, typology implies considerable tension at any moment in history between the sense of fulfillment and the sense of incompleteness; see Charity 1966 and Budick 1986; compare Paxson 1991.

³⁶ See, e.g., Kugel 1983 and D. Stern 1986. Conversely, Homeric interpretation has its own 'verbal' focal points; see, e.g., Long 1992 and Lamberton 1986.

³⁷ See, e.g., Charity 1966, Bruns 1984, and Lewalski 1979.

³⁸ For brief remarks about these developments, see the opening sections of chapter 12 (i and ii) below.

them; they leave their own powerful imprint on acts of interpretation. And such acts of interpretation, in turn, are not just structures of analysis; they develop distinctive shapes and styles of their own. This implies that it is necessary to consider not just the changing interpretation of texts, but the changing textures of interpretation itself.

B. Medieval philosophic designs: 'textures' of interpretation

To what extent might allegorical interpretation have 'textures' of its own? While scholarly research a generation ago emphasized the diverse conceptual categories (e.g., cosmological, ethical, mystical) of interpretive allegory, it tended to treat allegory primarily as a way to transform texts into 'abstract' systems. Such an approach developed in part from Romantic associations of 'allegory' with 'abstract' expression and thought. Though this approach points to one important aspect of allegorical interpretation and continues to influence many treatments of it, it has been gradually giving way to a more nuanced account of the subject. In principle, after all, allegorical interpretation is not *necessarily* abstract either in thought or in expression. As for thought, when Augustine interprets the division between light and darkness on the first day of Creation as the separation between the good angels and the evil ones,³⁹ it is hard to know which is more 'abstract,' the text or the interpretation. Already in the early 1970s, Morton W. Bloomfield is calling attention to the 'serious categorization mistake' of identifying the 'literal/allegorical' distinction with the 'concrete/abstract' one.⁴⁰ Further, even arguments expressly 'philosophic' in orientation, as a number of recent analyses have suggested, include vivid interior modulations and dramas of their own.⁴¹ As for expression, allegorical interpretation at times deploys conspicuously figurative language in its own right; in

³⁹ See *Confessions*, Book XI, chapters 9, 19, 20, 33.

⁴⁰ See Bloomfield 1972, p. 317.

⁴¹ See, e.g., the references above in chapter 1, n. 16. In a different sphere, compare Gossman 1990, p. 120 (prior version of essay 1976), on the problematic effort of the early nineteenth-century historian Prosper de Barante to attain 'absolute simplicity and transparency,' with Gossman's telling quotation, p. 253 (prior version of essay 1978), from Barante: 'Reason is as exacting as imagination . . . and desires that its drama and its epic, the hero of which is an idea, be also portrayed.'

some of its radically visionary or literary forms, it is impossible to separate the intellectual point from the imaginative presentation. Studies in recent decades by Hans Robert Jauss (1962, 1964, 1968, 1970), Peter Dronke (1970, 1974), Marc-René Jung (1971), Winthrop Wetherbee (1972), Brian Stock (1972), Heinz Meyer (1975), Grover A. Zinn, Jr. (1977), Peter Dinzelbacher (1981), Jon Whitman (1987), Jane Chance (1990), David Dawson (1992), and others have extensively discussed developments of this kind.⁴²

This is not to deny the broadly 'abstract' aspect of much allegorical interpretation. That aspect is especially prominent in various forms of philosophic inquiry—shared in part by a range of medieval Islamic, Jewish, and Christian thinkers—which closely correlate human understanding itself with the act of 'abstraction' from sense impressions.⁴³ Yet the critical theories, commentaries, and reflections of such thinkers frequently display not so much a schematic state of 'abstraction' as an intricate process of diversified movements from one reference point to another. Here I would like only to consider for a moment some of the variegated stylistic and intellectual textures related to even programmatically philosophic writing of the Middle Ages, with special attention to works from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries.

v. Philosophic modes in medieval Islam: 'Aristotelian' arts

A useful starting point would be to explore some of the structural implications for medieval allegory of the study of 'The Philosopher,' Aristotle. Over a generation ago most accounts of the philosophic affiliations of allegory, concentrating on ancient Greek or later Christian texts, tended to associate allegorical writing primarily with Platonic notions of visible phenomena pointing to invisible forms.⁴⁴ From this perspective, Aristotle was the principal philosophic source of alle-

⁴² More generally, some of the most 'abstruse' processes, like the convergence of the individual with the divine order at the end of Dante's *Comedy* or the movement of 'negative theology' in the fourteenth-century *Cloud of Unknowing* (on which see Burrow 1984), repeatedly involve an intensive engagement with concrete images.

⁴³ On this philosophic orientation, see, e.g., Altmann 1987 and Davidson 1992–3 (c. 1995).

⁴⁴ As late as 1969, Michael Murrin closes *The Veil of Allegory* by calling allegory 'a Platonizing system' (p. 169). This approach, which is appropriate only for certain forms of allegory in certain periods, continues to frame some general discussions of the subject.

gory's 'demise'—the Aristotle who 'integrated' phenomena with form, who restricted the role of 'equivocal' language, and who treated poetry not as a method of concealing 'under-senses' but as a mode of revealing 'universals.' But there is more than one 'Aristotle,' and the more the investigation of allegory includes non-Christian contexts, the more it exposes Aristotle's critical role in the conceptual and stylistic development of allegorical writing.

The development of philosophic allegory in medieval Islam is a case in point. Conceptually, for example, Islamic philosophers who allegorize passages in the Koran repeatedly operate with categories of analysis that blend Neoplatonic perspectives with Aristotelian ones. Thus, in the early eleventh century the influential Islamic philosopher Avicenna is construing the enigmatic 'Light Verse' of the Koran as an account of the process of illumination by which the 'material intellect' passes from 'potentiality' to 'actuality.'⁴⁵ Stylistically, such philosophers frequently appeal to 'Aristotle' as they explore the functions of indirect expression in the formulation of an argument. Already in the tenth century, Al-Fārābī is arguing that Aristotle himself intentionally writes in an obscure manner in order at once to conceal and reveal his teachings.⁴⁶ Whatever Aristotle's own intentions, he might have been interested to learn that the broader Aristotelian distinction of different levels of speaking and reasoning ('demonstratively' certain, 'dialectically' probable, 'rhetorically' persuasive) eventually comes to be applied to the interpretation of the Koran itself. Thus, in his late twelfth-century *Decisive Treatise* defending Koranic allegory, the Aristotelian 'Commentator' Averroes maintains that the Koran exhibits an array of demonstrative, dialectical, and rhetorical modes suited to the various critical capacities of diverse audiences.⁴⁷ While Averroes himself is more analytically oriented than most Islamic interpreters in his approach to allegorization, which he tends to associate with arguments approaching 'demonstrative' certainty, even he can

⁴⁵ See Avicenna, in the edition of Lerner and Mahdi 1963, pp. 116–18, and Gutas 1988, pp. 164–5. On less 'philosophic' treatments of this verse in early Shiite interpretation, see Bar-Asher 1999, p. 121, with pp. 87–124.

⁴⁶ For the ancient background of such arguments and their adaptation in Al-Fārābī and Avicenna, see Gutas 1988, pp. 225–34 and 297–318, and Lamberton 1995, p. 148.

⁴⁷ On the correlation of modes and minds, see the translation by Hourani 1961 of the *Decisive Treatise* (with the title *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*), pp. 45, 49, 58–66; Hourani's introduction, esp. pp. 32–4; and nn. 24–5 to the translation, citing the origins of the classification of modes in Aristotle's *Topics* and *Prior Analytics*.

argue in the mixed style of the *Decisive Treatise* that he is producing a 'certain' comparison by using a 'parable' (*mithāl*).⁴⁸ On a still different level, Islamic *falāsifa* are the first medieval thinkers to engage extensively Aristotle's *Poetics*, the work that refers the very term *mythos* not to a mere 'tale,' but to the 'plot' that is the 'first principle' (*archē*) of a tragic drama (*Poetics* 1450a). Recent works by Ismail M. Dahiyyat (1974), Charles E. Butterworth (1986), Deborah L. Black (1989, 1990), and Peter Heath (1992) have shown how encounters with the *Poetics* encourage medieval Islamic thinkers to give imaginative language a powerful *psychological* function beyond that of strictly analytic language.⁴⁹ Research by Sarah Stroumsa (1992) has suggested that Avicenna's approach to the *Poetics* provides him with a rationale for composing philosophy itself in the form of dramatic stories.⁵⁰ In chapter 7 of this volume, Alfred L. Ivry assesses those imaginative stories in relation to some of the idioms and ideologies of medieval Islamic allegory at large. In the end, the patterns of philosophic allegory in medieval Islam appear to be far too variegated in format to be reduced to 'abstract' systems. Indebted in part to the diverse figurations of 'The Philosopher,' its textures finally range from shifting styles of argumentation to the composition of dramatic plots.

⁴⁸ On differences between Averroes and his important predecessor Al-Ghāzālī regarding the conditions for allegorization, see Bello 1989, esp. pp. 52–81, 142–51, and the essay of Alfred L. Ivry in chapter 7 of this volume. On Averroes's association of allegory with 'demonstrative' analysis, see Hourani's translation of the *Decisive Treatise*, pp. 45–6, 50–4, 58–66, 70, and Hourani's introduction, pp. 23–6, 32–6; compare the essays of W.Z. Harvey 1988a, pp. 77–8, and 1991–2, pp. 28–9. Despite his emphasis on 'demonstrative' argumentation, Averroes appears to allow some allegorical interpretation on the 'dialectical' level; see p. 65, with Hourani's nn. 69 and 131. While the process of 'abstraction' is central to Averroes's view of demonstrative argumentation, the precise implications of the term need to be assessed with caution even with regard to his analytic approach. See, e.g., his argument in *Manāḥij* (partly translated in Hourani's 1961 translation of Averroes, p. 77) that while it is possible to refer Koranic passages about resurrection to solely 'spiritual' existence, to associate resurrection with 'corporeal' existence is 'more suitable for the elite'; compare Bello, pp. 126–41. On the mixed style of the *Decisive Treatise*, which is not strictly demonstrative, see Hourani's translation, p. 62, and Ivry's essay in this volume. On the 'parable' and 'certain' comparison, see Hourani's translation, p. 67, with his reference in n. 177 to the argument that the term 'certain' (*yaqīnī*; *yaqīnīyan* in Averroes's text) is 'equivalent to "demonstrative"'; compare my discussion of Maimonides below (vi).

⁴⁹ For some of the implications of Islamic approaches to the *Poetics* for medieval Christian critical theory, see Minnis and Scott 1991 (prior version 1988), pp. 279–84.

⁵⁰ In this respect, it is revealing that the Arabic translation of the *Poetics* that Avicenna uses itself elevates the word for a common 'tale' into a term for a coherent 'plot'; see Stroumsa 1992, pp. 198–9, on the word *ḥurāfa*. For some tensions

vi. *Jewish approaches to philosophic allegory: 'Mosaic' patterns*

In medieval Jewish philosophic allegory, textual commentary develops complex textures of its own. At times, it is true, such commentary tends rather schematically to align scriptural texts with conceptual systems. The Neoplatonically oriented work of the eleventh-century philosopher Solomon ibn Gabirol, for example, seems quite programmatic in correlating different components of the story of Eden with cosmic and psychic conditions (the four rivers as the four elements; Adam, Eve, and the serpent as diverse capacities of the soul), or in coordinating diverse expressions in a single psalm with the 'twenty qualities of man,' geometrically diagrammed as a combination of the five senses and the four humors.⁵¹ In the twelfth century, however, as the critique of scriptural language increasingly interacts with Aristotelian turns of thought, a more flexible kind of figuration develops in Jewish philosophic commentary. The preeminent work in this movement is Moses Maimonides' late twelfth-century *Guide of the Perplexed*, which exercises an imposing influence upon later Jewish interpretation. While drawing upon an expansive range of Jewish, Islamic, and Greek perspectives⁵² and recalling earlier interpretive procedures, Maimonides' treatise provocatively transforms them. In one respect, for example, its opening statement of purpose about explaining 'ambivalent' scriptural terms and 'parables' initially seems to suggest early midrashic concerns with the 'verbal units' of Scripture.⁵³

regarding the role of imaginative language in Avicenna, see Gutas 1988, pp. 165, 297–318, with the critique of Gutas by Stroumsa 1992, pp. 190–3; compare Black 1989 and 1990.

⁵¹ For the allegorization of Eden, difficult to assess in its original form since it is 'reported' by Abraham ibn Ezra, see the Hebrew text of ibn Ezra in Friedlaender [1877], pp. 40–1 of the 'Hebrew Appendix.' On the psalm, 'twenty qualities,' and the 'geometrical diagram,' see the ethical treatise of ibn Gabirol translated by Wise 1901, pp. 46–9, 42, with Wise's introduction. For a translation of the ibn Ezra text, an overview of ibn Gabirol's scriptural exegesis and the ethical treatise, and comments on the importance of 'analogy' in ibn Gabirol's general 'science of structures,' see Schlanger 1968, pp. 13–15, 17–18, 141–57; compare Hayoun 1992, pp. 115–18.

⁵² The classic overview is Pines's 'Translator's Introduction: The Philosophic Sources of *The Guide of the Perplexed*' in Maimonides, trans. Pines 1963, pp. lvii–cxxxiv.

⁵³ For the opening statement, see Maimonides, trans. Pines 1963, I, Introduction, pp. 5–6. I use 'ambivalent' here to refer loosely to the ambiguities of language at large; for early philosophic subdivisions, see, e.g., this passage from the *Guide* and H.A. Wolfson 1959. On 'verbal units' and midrash, see the discussion of midrashic interpretation earlier in this chapter (iii). For some of the implications of midrash for medieval philosophic allegory at large, see I. Heinemann 1981 (prior version

But the *Guide* radically reconceives such 'units,' seeking to turn them into starting points for elucidating the general principles of physics and metaphysics.⁵⁴ In another respect, the intricate format of the *Guide* sometimes seems to imply medieval Islamic treatments of philosophic discourse as a skillfully devised technique, diversified in meaning and diversionary in method.⁵⁵ But the *Guide* turns covert philosophic writing into a meticulously self-conscious form of art, marked by deliberate contradictions, intentional disruptions of logical sequence, the recurring concealment of one perspective by another, and the riddling exploitation of the very ambiguities of language that the work is supposed to resolve.⁵⁶ Something of its intriguing manner can be seen even in a glance at one of its basic topics. Near the opening of the treatise, for example, Maimonides indicates that the 'external' meaning of 'all parables' is worth 'nothing.' A few lines later, as if to turn nothing into something, Maimonides appears to give 'external meaning' a relative value; he now associates it with 'beautiful' silver filigree-work through which 'more beautiful' gold is seen.⁵⁷ Still later he argues at length that in attempts to represent God, not only figures of speech, but all the figurations of language, are radically deficient; in God there is 'nothing' that belongs to the same species as the attributes assigned to him. Yet in order to undermine such figurations, Maimonides here explicitly cites a rabbinic 'parable' that contrasts mere 'silver' with 'gold.'⁵⁸ A *Guide* of this kind is no mere 'abstract' instruction; the very texture of the argument keeps turning 'inside-out' and 'outside-in' by design.

Such a design, with its persistent tension between imaginative and philosophic language,⁵⁹ not only suggests the dynamics of Maimonides'

1950-1); Saperstein 1980; and Talmadge 1986; with regard to Maimonides, compare the essay of Warren Zev Harvey in chapter 8 of this volume.

⁵⁴ See S. Harvey 1991, pp. 52-5.

⁵⁵ On such Islamic attitudes, see the reference to Al-Fārābī above in this chapter (v); compare the Shiite defense of dissimulation (*taqiyya*) in doctrinal discussions, examined by Ivry 1986, pp. 142-5, and Kohlberg 1995, esp. pp. 368-73.

⁵⁶ See Ravitzky 1990 (c. 1991 [prior version 1986]), esp. pp. 160-2 and 204, with the detailed discussion and bibliography in the article at large.

⁵⁷ See *Guide*, trans. Pines 1963, I, Introduction, pp. 11-12. On some ambiguities in the term 'external,' see J. Stern 1995, esp. pp. 146-9 and n. 14.

⁵⁸ See *Guide*, I, 52-9, pp. 114-43, esp. pp. 140-3; compare Hyman 1991.

⁵⁹ On the ambiguous relation between imaginative and philosophic language in Maimonides, see Gruenwald 1991 and W.Z. Harvey 1988b, p. 63, n. 11; compare *Guide*, I, Introduction, p. 8. On terms such as 'beautiful' and 'nothing' in medieval literary allegory, with reference to problems of 'negative theology' and the 'analogy' between the world and God, see Whitman 1989, esp. pp. 267-74.

own intellectual program, but also anticipates some of the dilemmas of allegorization in later Jewish commentary. For Maimonides himself, the fact that the *Guide* is not composed in a 'positivistic' form dramatizes that indirect approach to God which he repeatedly stresses in the work, his radical *via negativa*. As the semiotic transfers he describes cannot exactly reach their divine object, Maimonides seeks to make them a means of transfiguring the human subject, whose very reading of such a *Guide* is to be a way of proceeding toward God.⁶⁰ An early sense of the critical function of form in Maimonides's treatise already appears among two of its first medieval commentators, Moses of Salerno and Zerahiah Hen, whose own thirteenth-century commentaries pointedly evoke his allusive manner; modern inquiries into its formal operation date especially from the work of Leo Strauss over half a century ago.⁶¹ Unlike Strauss, however, who stressed the esoteric directives of the *Guide*, many in recent years have tended more to emphasize the irreducible interplay among different perspectives in Maimonides' work at large—philosophic, theological, exegetical, legal, political.⁶² Some have suggested that the ambiguities of the *Guide* imply an uncertainty about precisely what human beings can 'demonstrate' or 'know,' or potentially reflect unresolved conflicts in the author's own mind.⁶³ In some ways such developments perhaps suggest broad changes in orientation toward medieval Jewish philosophic allegory at large. When at mid-century Isaak Heinemann composed his overview of such allegory, he stressed its far-reaching, 'scientific' ('wissenschaftliche') character, almost as if it were an early expression of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* that now explored it in turn. Twenty-five years later, Frank Talmadge emphasized rather the shifting perspectives of such allegory, its way of

⁶⁰ See, e.g., *Guide*, I, Introduction, pp. 6–8, 20; I, 59, p. 138; I, 60, p. 144; and III, 51, pp. 618–20. On the 'heuristic' value of the *via negativa* in Maimonides, see W.Z. Harvey 1988b, esp. pp. 69–71.

⁶¹ See Ravitzky 1990 (c. 1991 [prior version 1986]), esp. pp. 163–5 on Moses of Salerno and Zerahiah Hen; pp. 183–4 on the *Guide*'s translator Samuel ibn Tibbon, with the remarks about the 'allusive style' in ibn Tibbon's own work; and pp. 178–80 on Strauss 1952 (prior version 1941) and other works of Strauss.

⁶² See, e.g., Rosenberg 1981, Ravitzky 1990 (c. 1991 [prior version 1986]), and S. Harvey 1991.

⁶³ For arguments from different positions raising such questions, see, e.g., Pines 1979, Ivry 1986 and 1992, Gruenwald 1991, and Kreisel 1999, pp. 125–58 (prior version of essay 1994) and pp. 159–88 (prior version of essay 1992). For criticism of the 'radical' view expressed in Pines 1979 about the limitations of human knowledge for Maimonides, see, e.g., Altmann 1987 and Davidson 1992–3 (c. 1995), with the discussion of Kogan 1993 about later medieval Jewish philosophers.

exemplifying a 'freedom of interpretation' that allows Judaism to be 'played out in earnest.'⁶⁴ The essays on Jewish philosophic allegory in chapters 8 and 9 of this volume explore some of the deep conceptual and communal tensions in that interplay during and after the time of Maimonides. As Warren Zev Harvey's essay suggests, the very distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' meaning has not only a semiotic dimension, in the radical reassessment of scriptural language, but also a historical one, as the 'outsiders' of one generation develop into the 'insiders' of another. And as Gregg Stern's essay indicates, at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, controversies about allegory for a rabbinical authority like Menaḥem ha-Meiri include not only basic questions of philosophic content, but subtle distinctions about the textual settings and social circumstances in which such interpretation is to be practiced. From one perspective, at least, there is something to the argument that the intricacies of the *Guide* produce new perplexities of substance and style for philosophic allegorists who come after Maimonides. For he as it were seeks only to rewrite the work of one 'Moses'; they in effect seek to rewrite the work of two.⁶⁵

*vii. Christian allegorization of ancient philosophic writing:
cosmological operations*

There are other ancient writers besides Moses whom some medieval philosophers seek to rewrite. The efforts of Christians to interpret Plato, Macrobius, Martianus Capella, and others according to Christian doctrine already acquire extensive expression (including detailed textual 'glosses') in the early Middle Ages, and by the twelfth century these efforts take boldly sustained forms in the elaborate commentaries and cosmological reflections of Christian philosophers and theologians.⁶⁶ Twelfth-century allegorization of this kind is frequently

⁶⁴ See I. Heinemann 1981 (prior version 1950–1) and Talmadge 1976, pp. 344–5. It should be stressed, however, that Heinemann displays his own interest in 'play' and 'creativity' in early Jewish interpretation; in addition to pp. 249–50, 261, and 263 of the 'Scientific Allegorization' essay, see Heinemann 1936, e.g., pp. 12–13, 70–85, and Heinemann 1970 (prior version 1949); compare the comments on Heinemann in Boyarin 1990, pp. 1–12.

⁶⁵ For the late medieval origins of turns in perspective such as *Guide of the Perplexed* / 'Perplexity of Guides' and early Moses / late Moses, see Ravitzky 1990 (c. 1991 [prior version 1986]), pp. 171, 164–5.

⁶⁶ In addition to the important early work of Gregory 1955 and 1958 and the

distinguished less by abstract transfers or transparencies than by subtle tensions of thought and nuance. When writers such as William of Conches and Abelard interpret an ancient figure like Plato's 'World Soul' as the 'Holy Spirit' or divine 'love,' for example, their new composite points ambiguously in more than one direction—both toward the worldly animation of the pagan figure and toward the otherworldly inspiration of the Christian one.⁶⁷ The multivalent figures in such allegorical interpretation imply a multilayered cosmos, and research in recent decades by Winthrop Wetherbee, Brian Stock, Peter Dronke, Hennig Brinkmann, and others⁶⁸ has shown how meticulously twelfth-century cosmologists seek to expose diverse dimensions of discourse in order to explore diverse dimensions of being. The ancient Neoplatonic notion that each distinct level of 'procession' and 'return' in the cosmos has its own *logos*—both its own articulation and its own rationale⁶⁹—acquires expansive twelfth-century expression in the treatment of the universe as an intricate system of divine unfolding (*explicatio*) and enfolding (*complicatio*), in which the different modes (*modi*) of the divine order correspond to the different modes (*modi*) of human comprehension.⁷⁰ The term *explicatio* is suggestive in the context of the period; as Winthrop Wetherbee points out in chapter 10 of this volume, twelfth-century cosmologists treat the act of explicating ancient texts, 'uncovering' their *integumenta*, as virtually coextensive with the act of discovering the natural world itself.⁷¹ With the vivid allegories of Bernard Silvestris and Alan of

articles collected in Jeauneau 1973, see Wetherbee 1972, pp. 28–48, 92–125; Dronke 1974; Brinkmann 1980; Whitman 1987a, pp. 161–217; the essays of Wetherbee, Gregory, and Dronke in Dronke 1988a.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Whitman 1987a, pp. 192–208, with the references in the notes, and the essay of Winthrop Wetherbee in chapter 10 of this volume.

⁶⁸ See the writers cited in note 66 above, with Cadden 1995, pp. 4–12.

⁶⁹ See the discussion of ancient Homeric interpretation earlier in this chapter (i) and Robert Lamberton's essay in chapter 3.

⁷⁰ On this twelfth-century design, developed particularly in the philosophic circle of Thierry of Chartres, see Maccagnolo 1976, pp. 40–2, 112–16; Whitman 1987a, pp. 187–91; and Dronke 1988b, pp. 368–74. An important Neoplatonic intermediary is the ninth-century *Periphyseon* of John the Scot Eriugena; for some similarities and differences between the ninth- and twelfth-century designs, see Whitman 1987a, pp. 144–60, 169, 186–8, 190, 194–5, 214–15, 222, 224–5, 230, 237, and 250–1.

⁷¹ Compare Stock 1983, pp. 317–20, to which the essay refers; on *explicatio* in this context, see Dronke 1988b, p. 374. Compare Wind 1967 (prior version 1958), pp. 204–17, discussing the principle of 'unfolding' and 'infolding' for the fifteenth-century philosopher Nicholas of Cusa and applying it to (partly Neoplatonic) developments in the visual arts of the Renaissance, including 'discursive' and 'intuitive'

Lille in the middle and later decades of the twelfth century, the process of philosophic explication dramatically converges with the process of imaginative composition.⁷² Interpreting the story of creation by creating allegorical figures to act out the story, Bernard in his *Cosmographia* not only implicates the account of Moses with the concepts of ancient philosophy. He seeks to turn the very 'weave' of his text, with its dynamically converging and diverging characters, into an expression of a cosmos perpetually 'woven and unwoven'—'textit et retexit,' in the words of his work.⁷³ In Alan of Lille's later *Complaint of Nature*, the natural world itself turns into the work's principal speaker, self-consciously explicating herself in a highly wrought style, with her restless modulations of language suggesting her fluctuating modes of life.⁷⁴ The textures of philosophic allegory in this period repeatedly complicate the categories of 'abstraction'; in the end they pass into the realms of art.

*viii. Philosophic attitudes toward signification in Christian Scripture:
causal distinctions*

Over a generation ago nothing might have seemed less compatible with the designs of art than the 'abstract,' 'schematic' analyses of late medieval scholastic theology. But research in recent decades has shown that even the most austere frameworks of such theology fre-

treatments of hieroglyphics; see Charles Dempsey's discussion below in chapter 15 of this volume. Nicholas of Cusa's comment about 'the unfolding of the divine name' into many names (Wind, p. 218) can be both compared and contrasted with the Kabbalistic notion cited below in n. 73.

⁷² See Whitman 1987a, pp. 9–10, 218–62, and Whitman 1987b, with the references in the notes to earlier studies of these works.

⁷³ See Whitman 1987a, esp. pp. 220–43, 250–7; on the phrase 'textit et retexit' and its translation, see p. 255 with n. 51. Already in antiquity Philo refers to the cosmos as a 'variegated piece of embroidery' (*to pampoikilon hufasma*) and associates both the philosopher (who seeks 'to weave' together [*sunufainein*] the subjects of philosophy) and the human artist with the divine 'artificer of all this texture' (*tou plegmatos pantos toutou dēmiourgon*); see *De Somniis*, I, 203–08, pp. 405–09 in the translation of Colson and Whitaker (1934). Philo tends to describe more methodically the 'weave' of *logos*, however, than the 'texture' of the world or of art; compare *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 82–5. The Kabbalistic notion that the Torah is a weaving or a fabric (*arigah*) 'woven' from the name of God has its own form of operation. On the Kabbalistic principle, see Scholem 1965 (prior version 1956), pp. 42–3; my remarks in chapter 12 (i); and the essay of Moshe Idel in chapter 13 of this volume. On 'explication' and 'complication' in later interpretive designs, see my comments in chapter 12, nn. 96 and 122.

⁷⁴ See, e.g., Ziolkowski 1985 and Whitman 1987b.

quently implicate Christian Scripture with a variety of literary forms and figurations. A case in point is the widespread use of 'Aristotelian' categories of causality in critical discussions of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, specifying four 'causes' (material, formal, efficient, and final) in the making of sacred and secular texts.⁷⁵ At least as much as the differently conceived twelfth-century designs of *explicatio* considered above,⁷⁶ this late medieval attempt to apply a theory about the operation of the world to an account of the operation of a work involves serious strains. Yet the scholastic inquiry into causality promotes a certain discrimination of subtle forces potentially at play in a composition—for example, the degree to which the 'efficient' causes of texts (their authors) are personally responsible for the various views and voices articulated by them. In the text of Luke, argues Bonaventure in the thirteenth century, there is a divinely ordered 'triple efficient cause,' ranging from the 'person of the Holy Spirit' to the evangelist himself; in Ecclesiastes, Bonaventure contends, it is necessary to differentiate those passages in which Solomon speaks *in propria persona* from those in which he speaks in the *persona* of others.⁷⁷ More broadly, scholastic accounts of the 'formal' causes of Christian Scripture distinguish an intricate array of formats and modes (*modi*)—preceptive, exemplifying, exhortative, etc.—by which the text conveys its different messages to diverse audiences. Such multiple 'modes,' which suggest turns of style and structure considered in rhetorical treatises by Aristotle, Cicero, and others, do not smoothly fit the familiar multiple 'senses' of Christian Scripture (literal, allegorical, moral, and

⁷⁵ See Minnis 1984, pp. 5–6, 28–9, 73–167, and the critical anthology of Minnis and Scott 1991 (prior version 1988), pp. 2–5, 197–203, 314, 448–9, 452, 457, with the extensive late medieval discussions to which these pages refer. My account of critical treatments of causality and other late medieval developments in this section is deeply indebted to these two important works, though my orientation differs at times. The late medieval effort to adapt the Aristotelian system of four 'causes' to the critique of texts should be distinguished from the origins, organization, and operation of the 'fourfold' interpretation of Christian Scripture that develops in late antiquity. The claim of Fletcher 1964, p. 313, n. 11, that the 'fourfold scheme' is a 'translation into semantic terms of the fourfold Aristotelian scheme of *causes*' is both historically and conceptually dubious. See, e.g., Whitman 1987a, pp. 62–3, 67, with the detailed references in the notes, and the brief remarks in this section below.

⁷⁶ See the previous section of this chapter (vii).

⁷⁷ On late medieval treatments of 'efficient' causality and degrees of authorial responsibility in works inside and outside Christian Scripture, see Minnis 1984, esp. pp. 74–117, 162–5, 173–7, 185–217. For Bonaventure, see pp. 80–1 and 111, and compare pp. 174–5 and 189 on works outside Christian Scripture.

anagogic), as A.J. Minnis points out in chapter 11 of this volume. Oriented toward the arts of language, the scholastic discussion of 'modes' tends to associate patterns of meaning with the textures of writing itself, and by stressing the persuasive force of such writing, it emphasizes at last the 'final' cause of moving an audience toward a Christian response.⁷⁸

In retrospect, the application of Aristotelian causality to Christian Scripture thus directs attention not only to the formalities of the text, but also to what lies 'behind' the text (the responsibility of its authors) and 'in front' of the text (the response of its readers).⁷⁹ From the perspective of recent studies of allegory, such an appeal to far-reaching 'causal' frameworks may seem no sooner to modify one kind of 'allegory' (the four 'senses') than to prepare the way for other kinds. In the development of scholastic interpretation from the late Middle Ages to the Reformation, for example, the repeated emphasis on an underlying authorial 'intention' and the frequent identification of the 'literal' sense with it tends gradually to blur the very distinction between the 'literal' sense of a text and its divinely 'intended' meaning, its 'spiritual' sense; at times, the 'letter' virtually modulates into the 'spirit'.⁸⁰ And when the study of meaning after the Reformation

⁷⁸ On thirteenth- and fourteenth-century approaches to 'formal' causality and 'modes,' see Allen 1982; Minnis 1984, esp. pp. 118–59; and Minnis and Scott 1991 (prior version 1988), esp. pp. 3–7, 198–203, with the late medieval discussions to which these pages refer. On the position of the thirteenth-century theologian Henry of Ghent, who opposes the widespread view that Christian Scripture has a multiple 'mode of treatment' but supports the view that it has diverse styles and teachings suited to diverse audiences, see Minnis 1992, pp. 285–9, and Minnis 1995. On 'modes' and the influence of rhetorical discussions by Aristotle, Cicero, and others, see Minnis 1984, pp. 125–6, 133, 140–1; on 'final' causality and redemptive movement, see pp. 29, 78–9, 93, 120, 126–32, 162–4, 179, 187–8, 204–09, 217.

⁷⁹ The expressions 'behind' and 'in front,' anticipating the discussion below, have acquired particular currency with the work of Paul Ricoeur; see Gillespie 1986, p. 207.

⁸⁰ See Preus 1969, pp. 53–5, 67–71, 79–84, 98–9, 105–10, 117, 137–41, 146–7, 163–4, 170–1, 176–80, 184, 189–90, 214, on developments from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries; compare Jeffrey 1984 and Copeland 1993 on the convergence of 'literal' and 'mystical' senses for the fourteenth-century theologian Wyclif. An explicit argument about 'intention,' of course, is not the only context for the overlap between 'letter' and 'spirit' in this and other periods; see, e.g., Greene-McCreight 1999 and the concluding section (iii) of chapter 1 above. A range of considerations promote tendencies in Kabbalistic interpretation as early as the thirteenth century for the 'plain sense' (*peshat*) to converge with the 'mystical' sense (*sod*); on forms of 'hyperliteralism' in Kabbalah, see Matt 1993, pp. 200–07; E.R. Wolfson 1993; my remarks in chapter 12 (i); and the essay of Moshe Idel in chapter 13 of this volume.

comes increasingly to be associated with cultural and historical investigation, Christian interpreters conspicuously seek to frame the meaning of the text according to the 'spirit' of the author (and the age) or the 'consciousness' of the reader.⁸¹ In any case, as suggested above in chapter 1, the influential argument of Smalley, Spicq, and others that late medieval scholastic commentary tends to shift Christian attention to the 'literal' sense needs careful qualification.⁸² As the developments described in Minnis's essay suggest, while such commentary does revalue the 'letter' of Christian Scripture in certain respects, it also tends to incorporate within that 'letter' a range of metaphorical figures (e.g., Aquinas arguing that 'paraboli-cal' language is 'contained' within the 'literal sense') and conceptual frameworks (e.g., Nicholas of Lyra analyzing 'matter' as 'potential' in the account of Genesis in his *Literal Postill*) that increasingly align the 'letter' with imaginative and philosophic writing at large.⁸³ By the fourteenth century, about a generation after Dante transfigures the patterns of Christian Scripture and scholastic commentary in a literary allegory, Boccaccio is arguing that sacred and secular writings share a common 'mode of treatment' (*modo del trattare*), that 'Holy Scripture—which we call "theology"—is 'nothing other than a poetry of God,' and that Aristotle himself found that 'the poets were the first

⁸¹ See Frei 1974, pp. 51, 62–4, 76–9, 90–1, 160–1, 169–72, 179–201, 234–9, 256–9, 261–2, 265–6, 282–324, on such alignments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the argument of Childs 1977, pp. 88–92, that the 'literal sense dissolves' in critical efforts since the nineteenth century to investigate 'multiple layers *below* the text.' Compare Frei 1986 on twentieth-century approaches to the 'phenomenology of consciousness' in the school of Paul Ricoeur, with Frei's argument about resemblances to 'allegorical' reading (p. 48), and see Copeland and Melville 1991, pp. 166–8, 181, and Bruns 1992, pp. 216–18, 240–1, on twentieth-century 'hermeneutics' and 'allegory.' See also Crossan 1976, pp. 264–78, and Wittig 1976, pp. 333–40, on twentieth-century attitudes toward the reader's role in structuring parables.

⁸² See Smalley 1952 (prior version 1940) and Spicq 1944, pp. 20–1, 97–8, 267–88; more recently, see, e.g., Strubel 1975. Compare the essay of A.J. Minnis in chapter 11 of this volume, with the references in the notes.

⁸³ On Aquinas, see the frequently cited passage from *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. i, a. 10, in Minnis and Scott 1991 (prior version 1988), pp. 241–3, with the editors' remarks on pp. 205–06. On Nicholas of Lyra, see the essay of A.J. Minnis in this volume; for certain problems in Nicholas's treatment of the 'letter,' see Preus 1969, pp. 67–71, discussing the 'irony' in Nicholas's notion of a 'double literal sense,' and my discussion above in the closing section (iii) of chapter 1. For an earlier expansion of the 'letter' via 'physics,' see the twelfth-century treatise on creation attributed to Thierry of Chartres, discussed in Whitman 1987a, pp. 211–16, and Dronke 1988b, pp. 374–85.

theologians.⁸⁴ Whatever may be thought about Aristotle's or Boccaccio's views, it can be strongly argued that those later theologians, the scholastics, help to delineate the very textures of that 'poetry' for Christians in the late Middle Ages.

* * *

It would be possible to explore other interpretive patterns from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, ranging from the affective interior dramas of Cistercian commentary, such as Bernard of Clairvaux's sensuously personal engagement with the Song of Songs, to the ingenious expository 'pictures' of 'classicizing' friars, such as John Ridewall's exotically mythographic depictions of ancient gods.⁸⁵ Here I have sought only to suggest how even more systematically 'philosophic' interpretation in the Middle Ages includes not only ideological dimensions, but also imaginative ones. The idioms and ideas of such interpretation are expressions of each other: the variegated designs of Islamic argumentation with its Aristotelian reference points; the concealing/revealing methods of Jewish approaches to an enigmatic Scripture; the turning figures in Christian explications of an unfolding/infolding cosmos; and the manifold causalities in scholastic treatments of modulating aspects of Christian Scripture. If in one sense such interpretation is a way of 'abstracting' compositions, in another sense it is a way of interacting with them, even passing between their lines—intellectually, stylistically, and, in the end, historically. For commentaries of this kind do not just attach categories to texts; at times they turn into the cultural contexts and conditions of reading them. Even later interpreters who seek to break through those contexts frequently find themselves thinking through them—arguing

⁸⁴ See Boccaccio's *Short Treatise in Praise of Dante*, in Minnis and Scott 1991 (prior version 1988), pp. 494–8, with the discussion on pp. 382–94 and the comments of David Wallace on p. 455. For the relation between Christian Scripture or theology and secular poetry in Renaissance critical theory, see Trinkaus 1970, pp. 563–71, 683–760; Witt 1977; Greenfield 1981; Kallendorf 1995; and my discussion below in chapter 12 (ii). For some of the relationships and rivalries between scholastic approaches to poetry at large and 'humanist poetics' in the Renaissance, see Greenfield, with the qualifications of Minnis and Scott, pp. 9–11.

⁸⁵ On Cistercian commentary and Bernard of Clairvaux, see, e.g., Leclercq 1974 (prior version 1957), pp. 5–9, 233–86; Stock 1983, pp. 403–54; and Matter 1990, pp. 123–50; on 'classicizing' friars and John Ridewall, see, e.g., Seznec 1953 (prior version 1940), pp. 94–5, 167–70; Gombrich 1972 (not in prior version 1948), pp. 135–41; Smalley 1960, esp. pp. 110–18; and Allen 1979.

with the second 'Moses' in order to approach the first one, reconsidering 'matter' in order to reconceive Genesis. From this perspective, allegory not only outlines some of the 'forms' of formative texts, as suggested in the remarks earlier in this chapter on antique interpretation. It also informs those texts with textures of its own, and finally opens those configurations to new compositions in turn. But that is the subject of a later chapter. In the meantime, this 'letter' has already become longer than I wished. And besides, each of the essays to come has a spirit of its own.

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For the principles of citation here and in the essay itself, including references to 'prior versions,' see the introductory note to 'Works Cited' in chapter 1.

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A. ANTIQUE
INTERPRETATION
OF FORMATIVE TEXTS

LANGUAGE, TEXT, AND TRUTH IN ANCIENT POLYTHEIST EXEGESIS

Robert Lamberton

Introduction

Although the literature on the reception of classical Greek and Roman literature in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the modern world is vast, the history of the interpretation of Greek and Roman texts *in antiquity* has received relatively little study. The cause of this situation may be traced, first, to an inclination on the part of the philological tradition to deny that ancient readers treated the meaning of texts as problematical, and second, to that same, rigorously positivistic tradition's distaste for the scattered Greek and Roman interpretive texts that actually survive. These texts are almost without exception allegorical in nature and make claims about the meaning of the texts they address that are often odd, and seldom carry much persuasive force for modern readers. They are, nevertheless, the primary evidence for the nature of literary interpretation in antiquity, and deserve sympathetic attention. [On philological unease with allegorical interpretation, compare chapter 1 (i) —ed.]

The interpretation of literary texts in the Greek tradition remained a subliterate phenomenon until a relatively late date. That is, it belonged to the classroom or to intellectual discussion such as that reflected in Plato's *Protagoras*, but only exceptionally was preserved or treated as a literary end in itself. Although Porphyry, writing in the third century C.E., claimed that the allegorical interpretation of Homer could be traced back to a scholar named Theagenes of Rhegium, active in the sixth century B.C.E., our evidence for actual interpretive readings before the high Roman empire is incomplete and anecdotal. From the first to the sixth centuries C.E., however, there is a substantial preserved literature of allegorical interpretation of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, including the collection of allegorical readings

assembled by one 'Heraclitus,' probably in the first or second century, as well as that of Proclus in the fifth, along with the exceptionally beautiful essay of Porphyry on *The Cave of the Nymphs in the Odyssey* (trans. Robert Lamberton [Barrytown, NY, 1983]).

Much of this material enjoyed scholarly respect in the Renaissance, and we find it used as prefatory material to some early printed editions (see A. Grafton, 'Renaissance Readers of Homer's Ancient Readers,' in *Homer's Ancient Readers*, ed. Robert Lamberton and John J. Keaney [Princeton, 1992], pp. 149–72). The eighteenth century, however, pared away this baggage of interpretive material from the text of the poems, and its prestige and authority declined sharply. In the twentieth century, it was Félix Buffière (*Les Mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque* [Paris, 1956]) and Jean Pépin (*Mythe et allégorie* [Paris, 1958; enlarged ed., 1976]) who first attempted to take the allegorists seriously and to give them the sympathetic reading they deserve. Buffière also produced the first accessible edition of the collection of Heraclitus (*Héraclite, Allégories d'Homère* [Paris, 1962]). More recently, the crisis of literary theory of the Seventies has created a climate in which the efforts of the allegorists have come to seem far less strange, and far more intellectually engaging, than they had been for earlier generations. [Compare chapter 1 (iii). —ed.] Symptomatic of this change are such studies as Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley, 1986), and Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), both with additional bibliography, as well as intensified work on such figures as the Roman allegorist Cornutus (see Glenn W. Most, 'Cornutus and Stoic Allegoresis: A Preliminary Report,' in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2.36.3 [1989], 2014–65). The relationship of allegoresis to the activities of the Stoa has also received considerable attention, and A.A. Long ('Stoic Readings of Homer,' in *Homer's Ancient Readers*, cited above, pp. 41–66) has shown that the older literature (such as Phillip De Lacy, 'Stoic Views of Poetry,' *American Journal of Philology* 69 [1948], 241–71, still useful) was too willing to accept biased ancient testimony and find allegoresis wherever the Stoa is mentioned, and Stoics wherever there is allegory. [On the Stoics and on Heraclitus, see chapter 2 (i). —ed.]

* * *

The written word, for all its evasive ironies, all its inherent manipulativeness and its propensity to communicate not what *is*, but what

it wants us to believe, constitutes simultaneously the densest and the most problematical body of information we have about the past. To the extent that we are all in one sense or another historians, we take the primacy of this densely packed information for granted, and assume as our most fundamental activities its analysis, decoding, interpretation, and reuse. But however remarkable the bridge the written word creates in time, its truth value is ever suspect, and the moment we begin an inquiry conceived as other than historical in nature, asking not what *was* but what *is*, the status of the written word as path to truth is radically changed.

None of the ancient thinkers who addressed themselves to issues of hermeneutics was much concerned with what *had been*. Most situated themselves in the tradition of Plato, and the interesting things did not, in their view, change over time, though it was not inconceivable that phenomena here in this sublunary realm, and therefore subject to change, might have something of the truth to tell. For thinkers in the Platonic tradition from the time of Hadrian down to the end of polytheism—for Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus, and even Plotinus—texts, or at least certain texts, nevertheless had a surprising importance. The thinkers whom these men regarded as their spiritual and intellectual ancestors had not taken texts very seriously as paths to truth. But for whatever reason, these thinkers of the Roman period did take texts seriously, and it is surely one of the most striking and characteristic phenomena of late antiquity that among polytheist philosophers, certain texts from the remote past came to be considered authoritative guides to a truth of a theological and even a cosmological nature. As a function of this shift in perspective, we also find in late antique Platonism the first preserved attempts in ancient philosophy to formulate broad principles of hermeneutics.

A large number of issues of considerable interest emerge in this context, but what I want to explore here is an approach to three questions, of which the first is central: Given the discouraging range of positions reported in the dialogues of Plato regarding the usefulness of texts in the search for the truth, why did late-antique Platonists (or at least some of them) take texts so seriously and interest themselves in hermeneutics? The answer I would like to explore is bound up with a second question, concerning the role and status of language itself in late-antique Platonic thought. That problem will lead us as well to consider the third question of whether the project of a general hermeneutics of texts was envisioned by these thinkers, and alternately, what principles applied to which texts, and why.

The first, central question, as stated above, is little more than a restatement of a familiar paradox. There is probably nothing that so clearly characterizes the distance between Plato and the later Neoplatonists than the contrast between the reiterated rejection, in the dialogues of Plato, of poetic authority, and the insistent appeal to authority—poetic, oracular, or philosophical—in an author such as Proclus. A philosophical tradition that was born of an emphatic rejection of the received authority of the past, a rejection that went hand-in-hand with an explicit distrust of writing itself as a tool or vehicle of philosophical inquiry, became, in its later phase, one in which to ‘do philosophy’ meant primarily to comment on existing texts.

The Platonic texts are familiar enough and need no more than a nod here. The rejection of the Homeric poems as educational texts in *Republic* 2, 3, and 10 so blatantly flew in the face of the appeal to poetic authority that it eventually required an answer. The surprising thing is that it was over eight centuries in coming. Proclus, one of the last successors to the Platonic chair in Athens, rose to Homer’s defense in the fifth and sixth books of his *Commentary on the Republic*. But other Platonic texts are more damning still, including the famous passage in the *Protagoras* (339a–348a) in which the interpretation of poetic texts is specifically rejected as an activity that fails the most fundamental Socratic requirement for a tool of inquiry: it knows no *elenchus*, i.e. it cannot be tested. (We might translate this into contemporary terms by way of Karl Popper’s interesting principle for distinguishing between science and non-science—the former, according to Popper, is characterized by arguments that contain the conditions for their own refutation. The proposition is very Socratic in spirit, and points to a fundamental difference between hermeneutics in most of its manifestations, and hard science.)

The most familiar solution offered to this vexing question—why Platonists in the Roman empire apparently took poetic and philosophical authority so seriously in spite of principles set forth in the dialogues of Plato—starts from cultural context. It is based on the claim that Plotinus (already) in the third century, and far more obviously his followers Porphyry and Iamblichus, who lived on into the fourth, were living in a context in which Christians, along with other groups who founded their beliefs at least in part on the Hebrew scriptures, constituted an important element within the intellectual spectrum, an element whose claims to access to the truth were strident and could not be ignored. Plotinus wrote against the errors of

the Gnostics, Porphyry against those of the Christians. By the fifth century, when Proclus taught both polytheists and Christians in Athens, he was teaching in a largely Christian city, whose intolerance was to shut down his school less than a half-century after his death. Even if there was little in the intellectual life of Jewish, Gnostic, and Christian communities that need impress polytheist intellectuals, predisposed as they were (with few exceptions) to view their own tradition of wisdom as the only authentic one, those polytheists must have come to appreciate the power that a scriptural canon could confer. [On the status of scriptural texts for Jews and Christians in antiquity, see chapters 4–6. —ed.]

This scenario is attractive and certainly must be part of any discussion of the problem of the interaction of polytheists, Jews, and Christians in the sphere of hermeneutics. But whatever value this answer may have, it is far from complete. Certainly in philosophy of the fifth and early fourth centuries B.C.E., the appeal to authority is not an accepted form of proof or legitimation. Where Plato rejected earlier poetic accounts of the world, Aristotle often simply reformulated earlier positions to serve as background for his own. But by the end of their century, the early Stoa had already introduced a new approach to the past into philosophical discourse.

It is clear from Cicero's *De natura deorum*, among other texts, that Stoics took archaic poetry seriously as a path to the truth, that they interpreted Homer and Hesiod in such a way that non-Stoics found their hermeneutics self-seeking and intellectually dishonest, and that this hermeneutic activity was a striking characteristic of the activities of Stoics in contrast to philosophers of other persuasions. The reconstruction of that hermeneutics is extremely difficult, given the fragmentary nature of the evidence. Furthermore, students of Stoicism have tended to avoid the issue of Stoic interpretive theory and practice and even to view it as something of an embarrassment. The question is complex, but there does seem to be one important and fundamental issue at stake—it must be Stoic determinism that one way or another lies behind Stoic hermeneutics. In a world conceived as a closed system ruled by necessity, by rules of physical interaction of bodies determining every event from celestial mechanics to the apparently random or chance occurrences in our everyday life, cultural artifacts—verbal and visual—must as well have their proper and necessary place. And as a function of that place, they acquire a meaning and a representational value that is no less a function of

the necessary order of things than is the fact that the heaviest substances find their way to the bottom and the lightest to the top.

From here, it is a matter of transmission—by no means clear, but recoverable in its broader outlines. Stoicizing Platonists and Platonizing Stoics like Posidonius and Antiochus of Ascalon welded the two traditions together, infusing so much Stoic methodology and content into the Academy that from a second-century-C.E. perspective it was possible to wonder if there were anything Platonic left. The renaissance of Platonic thought in the second and third centuries, culminating in the great synthesis of Plotinus, takes largely for granted the truth-value of myth and archaic poetry. The earliest interpreters of poetry we find in this tradition are the second-century *pythagoreioi* Numenius and Cronius—and it is certainly possible that some material of specifically Pythagorean origin enters with them. It is nevertheless certain that most of Numenius' 'Pythagoreanism' has its source in Plato and in concepts presented by Plato as Pythagorean. He certainly wrote on problems in the interpretation of the dialogues of Plato, and it was perhaps in that context that he explored the meaning of the passage on the cave of the nymphs in *Odyssey* 13, as a complement to the explication of the Myth of Er in the *Republic*. By his time, in any case—the time of Marcus Aurelius—Platonists had begun to view in much the same light the problems posed by the myths of Plato and by the myths of Homer and Hesiod.

One further point needs to be added to this very broad survey. The development in question was by no means continuous among later Platonists. Plotinus, for example, shows relatively little systematic interest in hermeneutics in his writings (though we know from Porphyry's *Life* that in his school in Rome, a passage from an earlier philosophical commentary was customarily read aloud to serve as a basis for Plotinus' lecture). But as far as Homer and early poetry are concerned, Plotinus' knowledge of them proves to be unexpectedly extensive, and the citations and echoes carry with them the baggage of a long tradition of exegesis.

Plotinus' writings, which we have nearly intact in the form in which Porphyry edited them, address themselves directly to the issues under examination, not to earlier texts. They are essays, many originally lectures, on specific questions, issues, or problems. After Plotinus, the great majority of polytheist Platonist texts that reach us from late antiquity take the form of commentaries, for the most part commentaries on the dialogues of Plato. This genre began, as far as we

know, with Posidonius, in the second century B.C.E., and was thriving three centuries later in the time of Atticus and Numenius, but we have no commentaries on Plato preserved intact until quite late and no very substantial fragments of commentaries before those of Plotinus' student Porphyry on the *Timaeus* (and perhaps on the *Parmenides*). The hermeneutics of the earliest commentaries on Plato have not been studied in the depth they deserve, but one thing that is certain is that the enterprise was transformed, on both the theoretical and the practical level, by Iamblichus, early in the fourth century. The principal relevant fragment is from his commentary on the *Phaedrus*, and I will return to it when we come to the issue of general vs. special hermeneutics.

In the discontinuous history of Platonist concern with early texts other than those of Plato and Aristotle, two figures stand out conspicuously: Porphyry, who died about 305, and Proclus, who died about 485. The reasons why these two Platonist thinkers took early poetic texts and their exegesis so seriously were quite distinct. Porphyry, the literary executor of Plotinus, was first of all a popularizer. It was thanks to him that his teacher's works were edited and published to reach an audience beyond those who attended his lectures, and this did not come about by chance. Porphyry came to Plotinus in Rome from Longinus in Athens, and little as we know about the teaching of that Platonist (whom Porphyry called the *kritikotatos*, the 'most discerning critic,' of his time), it is clear that a concern with style and literary language was highly developed in his circle. We have here, then, in Porphyry, a Platonist philosopher whose rhetorical and literary education was exceptional, and who had a manifest commitment to communicate the fundamental truths of Plotinus' Platonic synthesis in simple terms. At the same time he continued to do what we might call literary work, assembling a collection of *Homeric Problems* of an almost exclusively philological nature and elaborating ideas of Numenius and some of his own into an essay on the cave of the nymphs in *Odyssey* 13 that has a right to be called the first surviving European essay in interpretive criticism. It is an essay in which a salvational or soteriological reading of the *Odyssey* is put forward, a reading that, more than any other that survives, demonstrates that in the third century Odysseus had become (against all odds) a hero of the denial of the flesh and an 'Everyman' whose story contained a prefiguration of the soul's return to its true home beyond the material cosmos.

Proclus, a century and a half later, was anything but a popularizer, but he did have in common with Porphyry an exceptionally complete rhetorical education, before he committed himself to philosophy. Aside from massive commentaries on the *Republic* and *Timaeus* and several other dialogues of Plato, as well as synthetic works, such as the *Platonic Theology*, he found time to epitomize the cyclical epics and to write commentaries on the *Chaldaean Oracles* and the *Works and Days*. It is in the context of his discussion of the Socratic attack on Homer in the *Republic* commentary that he enters the field of Homer interpretation, and it is here, for the first time, that a methodology of interpretation of poetic texts is elaborated in antiquity. Proclus was not engaged in an exercise in popularization, but rather in an attempt to reconcile two recognized authorities—neither Plato's definitive speaker Socrates nor the 'divine' Homer can be cast aside, and therefore when they appear to be in insoluble conflict, a viable hermeneutics must be brought to bear on the problem of reconciliation. In late fifth-century Athens, however, these were matters and texts to be studied only in private and only by an elect few, already advanced in their (polytheist) philosophical studies. For the *hoi polloi* with no hermeneutic sophistication, these poetic texts with their elaborate screen of fiction were, in Proclus' estimation, a pitfall to be avoided.

So much, for now, for question number one. It has provided me with an excuse to offer a crude chronological outline of the developments in question here, to suggest at least *when*, if not *why*, such a radical change in orientation toward the truth-value of texts came about. What I want to emphasize once again, however, is the *discontinuity* of the process. It would seem that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* read and taught from the second to the sixth century C.E. were pre-allegorized, pre-spiritualized, and more or less universally understood to permit, indeed to require, interpretation on multiple levels. Even though it is principally among the Platonists that we find evidence of direct concern with these problems of interpretation, it was only in isolated instances—Porphyry and Proclus among the Greeks, and Apuleius among Latin writers—that those who made a profession of philosophy also concerned themselves with the interpretation of poetic texts. [On the self-conscious engagement with such texts in later philosophy and mythography, see chapters 10, 12 (ii, v), 14, and 17. —ed.]

Let us now turn to the issue of language, as background to the more immediate one of texts and their interpretation. In discussions of Neoplatonism, the topic of the *inadequacy* of language is a familiar one. But in the instances we have been discussing, language and linguistic artifacts are in fact privileged—they are viewed as having a very special *adequacy*, and one, I think, that rests on a unique ontological status.

There is a very large problem here, too large to address in this context; it centers on the fact that we look in vain for any satisfactory account of language in the Greco-Roman world. This is of course rather strange in an intellectual tradition obsessed with the power of persuasive language and the analysis of its strategies. Going beyond rhetoric, it is possible to point to a spectrum of ancient inquiries into various matters concerning the use of language—from the largely self-deconstructing inquiry into etymology that constitutes the *Cratylus* to the examination in the *organon* of Aristotle of logical principles that are also principles of language—but what we miss is any far-reaching inquiry into its very nature. I often tell undergraduates that the truly unique thing about archaic and classical Greece seems to lie in a peculiar narcissism in the use of language—an odd sense that what they said was worth not only refining and polishing to an extraordinary level of elegance and precision, but worth saving as well. Nevertheless, the focus of their narcissism, language itself, seems to have corresponded to an analytical blind spot.

There seem to be two things at stake here. The first is that we demand that an account of language come to terms with language's signifying function—we demand an account that incorporates a semi-otics, a theory or at least an analysis of representation, of signification itself. If fourth-century philosophical inquiry was largely indifferent to these matters, the early Stoa, again, began to explore them. The texts are lacking, but the influence of Zeno and Chrysippus is everywhere evident in later attempts to come to terms with problems of meaning, including those of the Platonists. With this first problematization of the sign (including the linguistic sign), we may for the first time speak of a semiotics, a theory of meaning, and not surprisingly it is among the Stoics that we also find the first glimmerings of a hermeneutics, since a theory of meaning implies a theory of interpretation. That is the first side of the problem, and it lends itself to a reasonably straightforward historical formulation.

The second side of the issue is less easily defined or analysed, but it is perhaps best understood in the guise of a problem of vocabulary. There seems to be no single word in classical Greek, or Latin, to designate clearly and unambiguously the phenomenon we call 'language.' We think first, of course, of *glossa* (Lat. *lingua*), but that reassuringly concrete and tangible piece of metonymy seems always to refer to a *specific* language, a specific 'tongue'—as in Varro's title, *De lingua latina*—and the term seems no more capable of bearing the weight of the generalized category 'language' than its calque in modern English.

The next candidate is even more frustrating in its semantic range—*logos*—but this is the point where we will have to focus our attention in order to clarify the status of language from the perspective of late-antique Platonism. Even to summarize the complex history of the word lies far beyond the scope of this paper, but all I want to establish is that at the same time that *logos* bears the meanings 'reason,' 'rationality,' and so forth—that principle of order in human beings that guarantees the equivalence of the terms *kata logon* ('according to reason') and *kata physin* ('according to nature') in Stoicism—it is never divorced from what we may think of as its primary sense. Here, aside from designating a great range of modes of verbalization, it is simply a substantive formation on the stem of the verb 'to say' (*leg-*), an act of speech, a 'saying' or 'speaking' before it is even a thing said.

The dangers of generalization are myriad here; let us look at just one instance where this issue comes to the surface in a text. There is a tradition in the Greek thought of the Roman period of fascination with the intellectual qualities of animals. The concern can be traced to the biological inquiries of the Lyceum, but for all practical purposes it is first formulated in two of the oddest of the dialogues of Plutarch—*On Whether Terrestrial Animals or Sea Creatures Are More Intelligent* (*phronimotera*) and *On the Rationality of Animals* (*Peri touta aloga logoi khresthai*). Both of these influence Porphyry's essay on the eating of meat, where in a famous autobiographical digression concerning a tame partridge, he pushes to its limits the definition of *logos*.

The context is a discussion of the 'languages' of animals—Porphyry uses the term *phthenksis* or 'vocalization,' and the thrust of the discussion is the demonstration that the variety (the *poikilon kai diaphoron*) of these utterances guarantee their status as signs, their *semantikon*.

After a variety of anecdotes including that of the partridge he trained to converse with him while in Carthage, he tells stories of various fish that learned to come when called, and finally gets to the point:

And so the *phantasia* ('mental image') is the same as that of the speaker, whether it reaches the tongue or not. How, then, can it be anything but ignorant to restrict the term *logos* to human speech, just because it is comprehensible to us, and to deny it to that of other creatures? It is the same as if crows claimed that theirs was the only speech and that we were *alogoi*, since our utterances lack significance for them. Or if the Athenians said Attic was the only speech, and all the others who did not speak Attic were *alogoi*—and an Athenian could learn to understand crows quicker than he could learn to understand a Syrian speaking Syriac or a Persian speaking Persian.

The claims made for *logos* here are not exalted, but that is just what makes them interesting. What Porphyry indicates is that in normal usage the diagnostic characteristic of *logos* as opposed to mere *phone* or *phthensis* is signification, signification accessible to and interpretable by the listener. But, he claims, this view is naively anthropocentric—the fact that animal vocalizations are significant to *some* entity is enough to characterize them as *logoi*. What is crucial is that a *phantasia*, a visualization, an imagining, an image in the soul, lies behind that vocalization, and the *logos* is the more-or-less successful projection of that *phantasia* into the world. Now, in this psychology, *phantasia* is the lowest of the levels of activity of the soul. If soul directs itself upward toward *nous*, merges with *nous* and contemplates noetic things, it is fulfilling its highest calling. But in practice, even in such activities as geometry, whose true objects are noetic, the descent of the soul to the level of experience called *phantasia* can be essential, if only for provisional visualization of geometrical figures. And it is at that point that the unique phenomenon of *logos* intervenes as the bridge from the lowest level of the activity of the soul, *out* into the world.

The activity of soul is discursive: its attention moves from one thing to another. It is this restless, fragmented mental activity that spills out into the world by means of the signifying medium of the *logos*. From Plotinus to Proclus, later Platonists remind us again and again that this fragmentation is a function of the projection of truth into the world. The truth itself is not fragmented; the *noeta* are eternal, unchanging, and indivisible. But when through the mediation of soul they find expression in this world, it is only in the discursive medium

of language, fragmented in time, that they can be represented. Thus it is as a function of the very nature of the medium of expression that a fundamental distortion enters into any discourse about reality. The things represented are not implicated in the fragmentation of the representation. That fragmentation is, so to speak, the static, the interference of the medium—necessary, but misleading to those who do not understand the ontological complexities of the signifying function of language. And it is all, finally, a matter of that peculiar product of soul, the image of eternity that it has manufactured for itself, and that we call ‘time.’

The humble sort of *logos* from which we started, the one that Porphyry would extend to crows and eels and certainly to his pet partridge, is of course not the one we are accustomed to hear about in the context of later Platonism. The literatures on the *logos*-doctrine of Philo and the *logos*-doctrine of John the Evangelist are vast, and all, I think, must inevitably come back to some sort of appropriation of a Middle-Platonic foreshadowing of the *logos*-doctrine that Plotinus and Porphyry passed on to the later Platonists. The Stoics’ *spermatikoi logoi* (‘generative principles’) lurk there in the background as well. In a characteristic move, Plotinus binds together all of these sorts of *logoi* into a hierarchical series.

As physical speech (*ho en phonei logos*) is the imitation (*mimema*) of the *logos* in the soul, in the same way that in the soul is the imitation of one beyond. And as the spoken *logos* is fragmented in comparison with that in the soul, so is that in the soul fragmented in comparison with that *logos* that is prior to it and whose interpreter (*hermeneus*) it is. [*Enn.* 1.2.3]

The hierarchy sketched out here is developed as a simile, and Plotinus’ larger point is that *aretai* (‘excellences,’ ‘virtues’) are peculiar to the life of the soul, but have their antecedents and prefigurings on higher levels of experience. This is where *logos* comes in, and the series starts from the bottom, from the *logos* we all know as *logos* (Porphyry might have called it the *synegnosmenos logos*, the one we are all agreed to designate by that name)—the ‘*logos* in speech,’ or *en phone logos*. But that is a *mimema*, an imitation, of something else called a *logos* that exists within soul, and that in turn is a *mimema* of some further, more remote and elevated *logos* in the noetic realm. The hierarchy is typically characterized by increasing fragmentation, palpable in the discursive language that spills out into the world, but

only conceivable by analogy as we project the antecedents of the *en phone logos*, peculiar to the life of the soul in its interaction with the world, back up the ontological scale to the unity of the noetic. Whatever those other *logoi* are, they are not language as we know it, but somehow are able to be designated by the same word, *logos*. The key, of course, is in the mediating function. The *spermatikoi logoi* are the shaping principles that pass through soul from *nous*—that fiery mind-stuff that is the Stoics' very immanent, material, and so effective, divinity—to inform the *kosmos*. Each *logos* is an interpreter, a *hermeneus*, in that it takes something from a more unified, higher realm and expresses it, by fragmenting it, in a lower one. The interpreter betrays his text in a manner that is as inevitable as it is faithful. He resolves its simplicity into a complexity that is the only form it can take at this next stage in its journey outward from the *noeros kosmos*, the realm of intellect.

These relationships are made even more complex in a passage in Proclus' *Timaeus* commentary (1.135.25–343.15). There, *logos* is explicitly *gnosis aneiligmene*, 'explicated knowledge' of eternal things, and the increasingly layered, hierarchical late Platonic *kosmos* seems riddled with mediating *logoi*, each of them explicating and fragmenting some previous, more unified and coherent realm of experience, and so projecting its content ever outward, ever closer to the moment when the *spoken* word, the *en phone logos*, spills out, as a fragmented but nevertheless signifying pattern of sound, into the world. [On the 'explication' of a multilayered cosmos by a multifaceted *logos*, see chapters 2 (i, vii) and 10. —ed.]

I argued in *Homer the Theologian* that this hierarchy of metaphorical *logoi*, firmly based on the tangible and familiar phenomenon of the *en phone logos*, is the basis of the very special *adequacy* of language in later Platonism. Plotinus, whose biography Porphyry opened with the famous observation that he seemed embarrassed to be incarnate, nevertheless devoted a great deal of effort to arguing *against* the sort of dualism that he associated with the Gnostics, and which demoted the *kosmos* to the status of an evil creation of an evil demiurge. His *kosmos* was peculiarly adequate, and that adequacy was guaranteed by the *logoi* for which soul provided an adequate, though certainly not transparent, medium as they projected out from the *noeros kosmos*, close to the unique source of being, to bestow form on the essential non-being of matter. The ontology that lent dignity to the *kosmos* did the same for language, and at the same time it provided,

particularly when applied to the complex psychology of Proclus, a model for a hierarchical hermeneutics, in which every text implies and requires its interpreter, just as every level of experience and of knowing is 'refuted' at a higher level, while a lower level draws it down, explicates it, and elaborates it to make it accessible. [On Proclus and the multiple dimensions of language, compare chapter 2 (i) —ed.]

Finally, let us look beyond these broad conceptual underpinnings toward the question of a general hermeneutics.

The issue of a general theory of interpretation, a general hermeneutics, seems to me to be closely parallel to the issue of a general theology in Greek tradition. The period before Aristotle, in other words, is characterized by an extraordinary diversity—each manifestation of the divine in cult or myth seems to demand its unique response, just as each text commands a unique response every time it is used. We can point to instances of interpretation but not to a unifying theory or even to consistency of practice. In both fields, the Hellenistic period undoubtedly brought some normalization of practice, but for its results in theology we have to look to the Romans, and particularly Cicero, while any sort of synthetic hermeneutics is lost. Finally, it is in the last stages of polytheist Platonism that both areas are dogmatically systematized, and for both, the principal evidence comes from Proclus. Even among the later polytheist Platonists, though, there is evidence for not one but a variety of hermeneutic strategies, each directed toward a unique text or category of texts and shaped by the use to which those texts were put.

For thinkers in the tradition of Plato, the dialogues themselves were certainly the texts that most urgently needed explication, explanation, and elaboration, and here we have the elements of a hermeneutic program whose principles probably owed more to Iamblichus than to any other single thinker. The theoretical basis was explored and described by James Coulter in his general treatment of the 'theories of interpretation of the later Neoplatonists' entitled *The Literary Microcosm*. From the principle articulated in the first fragment of Iamblichus' *Phaedrus* commentary, that the *skopos* ('aim,' 'goal,' or 'object') of the dialogue as a whole must be conceived as *one*, and not multiple, develops an organicism of a remarkable sort. These texts bristle with anticipations of the sort of hermeneutic strategies that Hans-Georg Gadamer has made familiar in our own time. [For a contrast between the approaches of Gadamer and Hans W. Frei

with regard to ancient interpretation, see chapter 4, 'Bibliographical Introduction.' —ed.] The organicism of Iamblichus starts from the powerful move of claiming to define the unique subject of the text at hand—that is, of defining the field of the questions this text can be called upon to answer. In the *Phaedrus*, one way or another, every element of the discourse contributes to a unified discussion of *to kalon* ('the beautiful,' 'the fine'). Even here, the dialogue is *hen zoon*, 'a single living being,' and the later texts elaborate the microcosmic analogy, adding the text to the category of entities (including the human being and the *kosmos*) whose organization is determined by the now familiar triadic ontology of soul, mind, and the One. [On ancient and modern attitudes toward diverse forms of 'organicism,' see chapters 2 (i), 4, 12 (vi), and 18–20. —ed.]

There is a very real question, however, whether this Iamblichan hermeneutics of the Platonic dialogue was ever carried over to other texts. In fact, the rudimentary semiotic classification of kinds of poetry that we find in Proclus' discussion of Homer owes little to Iamblichan 'organicism,' though not surprisingly the triadic structures are omnipresent, and the three levels of being that are also three levels of experience will serve to define the range of possible poetic modes. Proclus' interpretive practice remains eclectic and cumulative, and contradictory readings are easily juxtaposed. He does have in mind a larger picture of the meaning of the Troy tale—the war of the *Iliad* and the sea of the *Odyssey* are both metaphors for the state of souls trapped in the *kosmos*, and the overall story is that of souls attracted by the spectacle of the beauty of the material *kosmos* (= Helen), of whom 'the more intellectual' accomplish their return to the source of being from which they came. But the status of this 'big picture' is entirely different from that of the *skopos* of a Platonic dialogue in Iamblichus' terms—it is incidental to his major discourse on Homer and must be assembled from other texts. The 'big picture' is never invoked to justify a reading of the poem or to guide the student. Texts on the scale of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* seem not to have been read according to the same rules that applied to the dialogues of Plato.

What we have, then, among the later Platonists, is a thrust toward a general hermeneutics, and, most remarkably, a first attempt in the Greek tradition to articulate and apply hermeneutic principles in a systematic way. But the field remained fragmented and the enterprise a fundamentally makeshift one, adapted to the text in question and to the function it needed to serve in the immediate context.

The three questions opened here do not, of course, exhaust the range of problems raised by the hermeneutic activities of the later polytheists. They do, however, define three areas in which those efforts might be held up for comparison with those of these thinkers' Jewish and Christian contemporaries. All three traditions were creative and productive in the area of hermeneutic inquiry in the early centuries of the Common Era, but their interactions and reciprocal debts remain obscure. Still, even if they are reticent to the point of obfuscation regarding their theoretical and procedural borrowings, I believe it is by posing such questions as these that we have the best chance of throwing light on their interactions.

PLATO'S SOUL AND THE BODY OF THE TEXT IN PHILO AND ORIGEN

David Dawson

Bibliographical Introduction

This essay examines some of the ways that two ancient Alexandrian thinkers, the Jewish Platonist Philo (ca. 25 B.C.E. – 50 C.E.) and the Christian Platonist Origen (184/5 – ca. 254 C.E.), used the metaphor of a text's body in the course of their accounts of the transformative effects of allegorical reading.¹ Philo and Origen closely connect the text's body (its textuality) and soul (its meaning) with the bodies and souls of the text's allegorical readers. By describing a reading process that forges strong links between real and textual bodies, and real and textual souls, these two Platonists radically transform Plato's conception of a soul that is properly non-textual and non-bodily (for an account of Plato's quest for a soul purified from the influences of poetic narratives and the body, see Eric A. Havelock's *Preface to Plato* [Cambridge, Mass., 1963]). [On some attitudes of other ancient interpreters toward the body, see chapter 6; on some differences in orientation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see chapter 19. —ed.]

In the course of the essay, I examine passages from Plato's *Republic* and *Phaedrus* (conveniently available in Greek and English in The Loeb Classical Library; newer English translations in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns [Princeton, N.J., 1961]); from Philo's *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, *On the Migration of Abraham*, and *The Contemplative Life* (also available in the Loeb series); and from Origen's *On First Principles*, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, *Against Celsus*, and 'Commentary on Psalm 1.5' (Greek and Latin

¹ I wish to express my appreciation to the National Endowment for the Humanities, which provided a Summer Stipend in support of the research project on which this essay is based.

texts in *Origenes Werke in Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*, vols. 5, 4, 1–2, and 27, respectively; English translations in *Origen: On First Principles*, trans. G.W. Butterworth [New York, 1966]; *Origen. Commentary on the Gospel According to John Books 1–10*, trans. Ronald E. Heine [Washington, D.C., 1989]; *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick [Cambridge, 1965]; and [for fragments from the ‘Commentary on Psalm 1.5’] Jon F. Dechow, *Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity: Epiphanius of Cyprus and the Legacy of Origen* [Macon, Ga., 1988], 373–76).

To view ancient allegorical reading of texts as a means by which non-textual, and especially non-narrative, forms of human identity were re-textualized or re-narrativized, is to challenge the dominant understanding of the subject. Scholars typically regard allegorical reading as inherently uncommitted to the significance of textual details in their own right. Classicists who have long debated whether ancient allegorical reading was a ‘positive’ technique of authentic philosophizing or a ‘defensive’ effort to protect the poets against philosophical attack have tended to agree that allegorical practice was valued precisely for its capacity to move readers’ attention away from the particularities of texts (see J. Tate, ‘On the History of Allegorism,’ *Classical Quarterly* 28 [1934]: 105–14). Similarly, whether theologians and scholars of ancient biblical interpretation have applauded allegorical reading as a means of discerning the deeper spiritual meanings of scripture, or, contrasting it with ‘typology,’ attacked it as a way of replacing scriptural with non-scriptural meanings, they have often agreed that allegorical reading serves to displace the text itself in favor of something ultimately deemed more important (for an influential example of this sort of allegory/typology contrast, see Erich Auerbach, “‘Figura,’” trans. Ralph Manheim, in Auerbach’s *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* [1959; rpt. Minneapolis, 1984], 11–71).

In *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley, 1992), and in the present essay, I have explored some aspects of the alternative possibility—that allegorical reading by ancient Jews and Christians, at least in certain circumstances, enabled the particularities of the scriptural canon to reshape, and thereby reinterpret, the non-scriptural meanings prominent in the interpreter’s culture. There is an interesting similarity between my challenge to those scholars of biblical interpretation who have denigrated allegorical reading for theological reasons and Robert Lamberton’s challenge to those clas-

sicists who have dismissed polytheist Neoplatonic allegorical reading as a reasonable form of textual interpretation. In *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (1986; rpt. Berkeley, 1989), Lamberton treats ancient polytheist allegorical readers as serious interpreters of texts *as texts*; Porphyry and Proclus are presented as genuine literary critics whose interpretative efforts were designed to take readers further into the semantic depths or heights of ancient Greek epic. There is also an interesting and possibly telling difference between our two studies, however: whereas Lamberton discerns affinities between ancient polytheist allegorical conceptions of the text as symbol and contemporary philosophical hermeneutics (such as Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 2nd ed. [Tübingen, 1965]—see Lamberton, 'Afterword,' 298–305), I detect affinities between ancient Jewish and Christian allegorical construals of scripture as narrative and contemporary theological reflection on narrative meaning (such as Hans W. Frei's *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* [New Haven, 1974]—see Dawson, 'Introduction,' 15–17). [Compare Robert Lamberton's essay in this volume, chapter 3. —ed.]

Of course, ancient Jews and Christians could also regard texts as collections of symbols, and ancient polytheists could also attend to the narrative quality of texts, so the distinction just noted can only be one of emphasis. Indeed, the strikingly non-narrative character of the philosophical reflection in Plotinus's *Enneads* (see Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 83–107) provides a sharp contrast to the narrative attentiveness of both the Christian Origen and the anti-Christian Porphyry. Whether this apparent difference of emphasis between symbol and narrative points to more fundamental and far-reaching differences between ancient polytheist, Jewish and Christian allegorical readings and the forms of human identity they promote is a question that awaits further investigation. One might ask, for instance, in what specific ways *texts as such* made important differences to the meanings various allegorical readers discerned in them, or just what sort of difference it made to those meanings when interpreters chose to regard texts as collections of stories rather than symbols.

Three classic works provide useful background for the further study of ancient allegorical interpretation: Félix Buffière's *Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque* (Paris, 1956); Henri de Lubac's *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, 2 pts. in 4 vols. (Paris, 1959–1964); and Jean

Pépin's *Mythe et allégorie: les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes* (1958; augmented ed. Paris, 1976). For Neoplatonist interpretation, in addition to Lamberton, see the earlier work by James A. Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm: Theories of Interpretation of the Later Neoplatonists* (Leiden, 1976). For the early Alexandrian allegorical tradition, in addition to Dawson, see Christoph Blönnigen, *Der griechische Ursprung der jüdisch-hellenistischen Allegorese und ihre Rezeption in der alexandrinischen Patristik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992). Henry Chadwick places Philo and Origen in their common philosophical context in 'Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought,' in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge, 1967, 133–57). For Philo's reception by ancient Christians, see David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Minneapolis, 1993). The following works help locate the two interpreters in the context of Hellenistic culture and society: Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, trans. S. Applebaum (Philadelphia, 1977); Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge, 1975); John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (New York, 1983); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988).

For general introductions to each figure, see Samuel Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (New York, 1979), and Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (Atlanta, 1983). The standard bibliographies on Philo include H.L. Goodhart and E.R. Goodenough, 'A General Bibliography of Philo Judaeus,' in E.R. Goodenough, *The Politics of Philo Judaeus: Practice and Theory* (New Haven, 1938, 125–321); Louis E. Feldman, *Scholarship on Philo and Josephus (1937–1962)* (New York, 1963); R. Radice and D.T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria: An Annotated Bibliography 1937–1986* (Leiden, 1988). Peder Borgen distills recent scholarship in 'Philo of Alexandria: A Critical and Synthetical Survey of Research since World War II,' *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 21.1 (1984): 98–154. For bibliography on Origen, see Henri Crouzel, *Bibliographie critique d'Origène* (The Hague, 1971) and Supplement I (1982). See also Henri Crouzel's survey of research in 'The Literature on Origen, 1970–1988,' *Theological Studies* 49 (1988): 499–516. For recent studies of Philo's and Origen's allegorical interpretation that intersect with some of the concerns of the present essay, see Jaap Mansfeld, 'Philosophy in the Service of Scripture: Philo's Exegetical Strategies,' in *The Question of 'Eclecticism':*

Studies in Later Greek Philosophy, ed. John M. Dillon and A.A. Long (Berkeley, 1988, 70–102), and Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin, 1986).

I

Philo and Origen use the analogy of body and soul for text and meaning in order to describe the transformative effect of reading scripture allegorically on readers.² The obscure origin of the analogy in the Greek tradition lies in pre-Socratic thought, but its full elaboration seems to have required the sharp body-soul distinction that one finds in Plato's dialogues.³ Plato's use of the analogy reflects considerable skepticism about the philosophical usefulness of writing in general, as well as more specific criticism of the pedagogical value of ancient Greek poetry. Writing, Plato insists in the *Phaedrus*, does a poor job of conveying one person's thought to another; instead, persons should speak for themselves in that kind of collaborative interrogation of claims known as 'dialectic.' As for poetic narratives, one simply ought not to surrender oneself to their rhythms and images and thereby uncritically absorb through repetition and memorization the debased ethical norms of Greek culture. Rather ought one to break free from the syntax of poetic narrative and, as an

² To imagine the relation of meaning to text as soul to body is to imply simultaneously that texts are, in some sense, 'human,' and that human readers are, in some sense, 'textual,' a notion that lies somewhere between Romantic hermeneutical theory (as in Friedrich Schleiermacher), which regards texts as 'human' because they embody the spirit or intentions of their authors, and recent Deconstruction (as in Jacques Derrida), which has made the suggestion that human beings are 'textual' less odd than it might at first appear. For a discussion of an influential contemporary version of this contrast as it appears in the literary theories of Harold Bloom and Paul de Man, see David Dawson, *Literary Theory*, Guides to Theological Inquiry, ed. Kathryn Tanner and Paul Lakeland (Minneapolis, 1995).

³ Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, 197–98, briefly summarizes the development of the category of *psychē* from Homer and the pre-Socratic philosophers to Plato. On the background of the analogy itself, see Annewies van den Hoek, 'The Concept of *sōma tōn graphōn* in Alexandrian Theology,' *Studia Patristica* 19, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven, 1989), 250–54. Van den Hoek claims that the phrase 'body of the text' did not exist outside ancient Jewish and Christian circles before Philo. But *Phaedrus* 264C indicates that the comparison of a written speech to a living body was a commonplace by the time of Plato (although Plato does not use the exact phrase *sōma tōn graphōn* but refers to the *sōma* of Lysias's written speech or *logos*).

independent, self-sufficient, rational being, turn toward a set of new objects of knowledge—things as they are in themselves—‘located’ in non-narrative, logical space.⁴

Only in light of Plato’s revisionary aspiration to eliminate the category of narrative in order to make philosophical reflection rather than literary imitation the basis for Greek moral education can one fully grasp the significance of how the later Platonists Philo and Origen use the analogy of the text’s body. For them, the analogy becomes part of a much larger practice that effectively reversed Plato’s assault on the place of narrative in the best human life. Philo’s and Origen’s attempts at re-narrativizing their Platonic philosophical tradition were matched by the interpretative efforts of polytheist Neoplatonists such as Porphyry and Proclus. As surprising as it might seem to most readers of Plato’s *Republic*, in the late antique Greco-Roman world, it turns out that Jewish, Christian and polytheist Platonists were all seeking wisdom by reading allegorically just the sort of traditionally authoritative narrative texts for which Plato had found little use.

Criticizing Lysias’s written speech in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates draws an analogy between a well-organized oration and the body of a living organism:

Well, there is one point at least which I think you will admit, namely that any discourse [*logos*] ought to be constructed like a living creature [*zōion*], with its own body [*sōma*], as it were; it must not lack either head or feet; it must have a middle and extremities so composed as to suit each other and the whole work. (*Phaed.* 264C)⁵

Socrates has already observed that Lysias’s speech lacks ‘any cogent principle of composition’ (264B), glaringly revealed in his failure to define the topic of his oration at its outset. Lacking the sort of real knowledge about the truth of his subject that a definition could convey (263E), Lysias’s speech does not display true ‘art’ or *technē*. Although Socrates can imagine Lysias’s text as a body, he does not mention its soul; indeed, it seems that he has invoked the body/soul

⁴ See Havelock; Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1986), Interlude 1 (122–135).

⁵ English translation of *Phaedrus* passages by R. Hackforth in *The Collected Dialogues*. All English translations of primary texts in this essay (occasionally modified in light of the original languages) are taken from the works listed in the Bibliographical Introduction.

analogy only in order to deny its full applicability to Lysias's speech. Because his speech is not based on a knowledge of truth in his soul, Lysias lacks the *technē* that could embody such knowledge as the 'soul' of a text whose very textual organization would then express the coherence and logic of that knowledge. [On various notions of 'organicism' in later critical theory, see chapters 2 (i), 3 (conclusion), 12 (vi), and 18–20. —ed.]

Further on in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates insists that writing can at best provide only an external reminder of what originated within a speaker and can only be effectively expressed orally. Rather than a body with a soul, writing (*graphē*) is now compared to a portrait (i.e., a drawing of a living being—*zōgraphia*):

You know, Phaedrus, that's the strange thing about writing, which makes it truly analogous to painting. The painter's products stand before us as though they were alive: but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence. It is the same with written words: they seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you the same thing forever. (*Phaed.* 275D)

Whatever else this criticism might mean, it cannot mean that writing fails absolutely, in the sense that there is no connection whatsoever between writing and the *technē* of true knowledge. For if this were so, one would not even be able to recognize that Lysias's written speech was disorganized; writing could not express even the disorganization of something to which it bore absolutely no relation. Although writing is only an image of the original living (*empsychon*) speech (276A), there is nonetheless filiation between original as parent and image as offspring: direct speech, though 'much better and more effective' than its written image, is still 'brother' to it, though, unlike the written image, this brother is of 'unquestioned legitimacy' (276A).

Although body has become a metaphor in Socrates' formulation, the soul in question remains quite literally Lysias's own. Lysias's text lacks an adequate 'body' because Lysias lacks adequate knowledge of his subject matter in his own soul. But what if Lysias did have such knowledge? Could his knowledge of *erōs* achieve a properly embodied form in a text? Can any sort of writing express the content and organization of such knowledge? Yes, Socrates replies, but only 'the sort that goes together with knowledge, and is written in the soul of the learner.' What is this 'writing in the soul'? 'You mean,' concludes Phaedrus, 'no dead discourse, but the living speech,

the original of which the written discourse may be fairly called a kind of image' (276A). We seem to have come full circle: just as the 'writing in the soul' is 'living' or 'ensouled speech,' so the wrong sort of speech is a kind of ineffective writing (277E–278B).⁶

Proper writing ('in the soul') is the result of dialectic itself, as it occurs in an interpersonal, oral, pedagogical setting. Even speech that is not dialectic is, like non-dialectic writing, devoid of knowledge. While Plato seems to grant that a text, like a kind of body, can manifest to some limited degree the knowledge present in its author's soul, he does not suggest that the author's knowledge moves into the text itself as a meaning that it possesses: a text remains subservient to its author, and it is the author's soul that is the true repository of that knowledge. The text as an image of 'writing in the soul' can, it seems, provide negative witness to the absence of that knowledge (as does the recognizably disorganized body of Lysias's text). And the metaphor of writing for the originally spoken knowledge suggests the persistence of some form of syntax or structure that could provide a positive expression of knowledge (however, in the *Republic's* famous metaphor of the Divided Line, we learn that such proper syntax is more nearly mathematical than narrative in character). What is clear is that narrative syntax or structure, whether of verse or prose, does not do an adequate job. Consequently, there can be no reason for a philosopher to spend time trying to interpret such writings.

With complete consistency, then, Plato rejects, as philosophically pointless, the well-established technique of reading poetic narratives allegorically (*Rep.* 378). On the one hand, the obvious meaning of an epic text (*logos*) describing the loves or quarrels of the gods makes its inescapable, pernicious imprint (*typos*) on readers, teaching its debased moral principle (called variously *doxa*, *nomos*, or *typos*). Whether or not it also hides a more acceptable 'allegorical meaning' (*hyponoia*) is of no consequence for the philosopher. Such hidden meanings, if they exist, are typically false. And even if they were true (as may be the case since poets are sometimes divinely inspired), they would have been arrived at by the poet prior to his composition of the poem, and hence would in principle be discoverable by the philoso-

⁶ On the persistence of the metaphor of writing in the *Phaedrus* despite Plato's privileging of speech, see Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy,' in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago, 1981), 65–171.

pher without the help (or rather, interference) of obscure poetic imagery. All of this leads Plato to deem allegorical reading of poetic narratives a waste of time that a lover of wisdom might spend more productively on the direct pursuit of the true objects of knowledge. And yet for the Platonists Philo and Origen, allegorical reading of scripture seems to be one of the most productive things a philosopher can do.

II

In his *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, Philo offers an allegorical reading of Genesis 24:29 ('Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban'):

Our soul has a natural brother who is rational and one who is irrational. Now to the rational part is assigned Rebekah the virgin, (who is) constancy and perseverance; and Laban (is assigned) to the irrational part, for this (name) is to be translated as 'whiteness,' which is a figure of the honours (shown) to the splendour of sense-perceptible things. (*QuGen.* 4.117)

Although at first it looks as if Philo is interested in the identity of Laban, his real question is just how Laban can be the 'brother' of Rebekah. Just what could be the relationship between the irrational and the rational parts of the soul? Philo cannot address that question without bringing into the discussion the entire human person—mind, senses, and body—and examining the way in which these features of a person work together in the act of perception. To make the relationships clearer, he invokes what presumably is, for his readers, a better understood analogue, the three elements of written sound—consonants, semi-vowels and vowels:

For just as the consonant by itself alone has no sound at all but (only) when combined with a vowel achieves a literal sound, so also is the body by itself alone unmoving; and it is moved by the rational soul through the several organic parts toward that which is suitable and necessary to it.

Again, just as the semi-vowels make lame and imperfect sounds, but, if they are combined with vowels, make fully articulated speech, so also is sense-perception (only) half effective and imperfect, and it occupies a position midway between the mind and the body, for it has a part in each of them; it is not inanimate like the body, and it is not

intelligent like reason. But when the mind by extending itself is fused with, and engraved on it, it prepares it to see and hear rationally and at the same time to speak with reason and to perceive rationally.

However, in the same way as the vowels by themselves alone and also when combined with other (sounds) produce sound, so also is the mind moved by itself alone without anything else, since intelligible things are received and grasped by themselves alone, and it is also the cause of the movement of other things, giving release like the leader of a chorus. But, as I have said, the senses (are moved) to bodily perception by the rational part and are, as it were, effectively brought to their natural functions by the voices of the organic parts. (*QuGen.* 4.117)

Philo contends that just as speech results from the combination of vowels and consonants (and semi-vowels show just what that combination involves), so rational perception of the external world results from the combination of rational soul and body as mediated by the senses. Philo focuses on Laban (sense-perception) as brother to Rebekah because he is interested in just how the mind engages the world through the body: 'when the mind by extending itself is fused with, and engraved on it [sense-perception], it prepares it to see and hear rationally and at the same time to speak with reason and to perceive rationally.' 'Fused with' and 'engraved' become ways of explaining the epistemological sense conveyed by the narrative remark that Laban is Rebekah's brother. Like Plato, Philo is speaking about language in a way that privileges speech (here, by making the body or consonant the passive instrument of the active mind or vowel). But unlike Plato, Philo is concerned to stress the positive and productive interaction of mind and body. His entire discussion divides the whole human being and written speech into three components, but the division is solely for the sake of describing the modes of their functional interaction. In this passage, the body of the text is rooted in the consonants of language, a point which takes on considerable import when combined with the characteristic philological detail of Philo's allegorical readings of scripture.⁷ The fate of the scripture reader's soul is intimately bound up with the text precisely as it is written, for one of the things sense-perception brings into contact with mind is the narrative detail of a text. Philo's allegorical reading of this text as an account of epistemology, in the way that it makes the role of sense-perception pivotal, turns out to warrant the epistemological

⁷ See Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 73–126.

importance of the narrative character or body of the text that is being read allegorically.

Philo connects the allegorical reader's soul not only with the text as body, but also with the reader's bodily performance of the text as law. In *On the Migration of Abraham*, Philo criticizes other Jewish interpreters of the Pentateuch for using allegorical readings to justify non-observance of Jewish law:

There are some who, regarding the written laws as symbols of intellectual things, are overpunctilious about the latter, while treating the former with easy-going neglect. Such men I for my part should blame for handling the matter in too easy and off-hand a manner: they ought to have given careful attention to both aims, to a more full and exact investigation of what is not seen and in what is seen to be stewards without reproach. As it is, as though they were living alone by themselves in a wilderness, or as though they had become disembodied souls, and knew neither city nor village nor household nor any company of human beings at all, overlooking all that the mass of men regard, they explore reality in its naked absoluteness. These men are taught by the sacred word to have thought for good repute, and to let go nothing that is part of the customs fixed by divinely empowered men greater than those of our time. (*Mig.* 89–90)

Philo goes on to agree with these allegorical readers that the Sabbath, the feasts, and circumcision all have deeper, spiritual meanings (human dependence on God; the gladness and thanksgiving of the soul; the removal of pleasure, passion, and conceit; *Mig.* 91–92.) But he turns to the analogy of body and soul in order to stress the intrinsic connection between such ritual performances and their allegorical meanings:

Why, we shall be ignoring the sanctity of the Temple and a thousand other things, if we are going to pay heed to nothing except what is shown us by the inner meaning of things. Nay, we should look on all these [outward observances] as resembling the body, and these [inner meanings as resembling] the soul. It follows that, exactly as we have to take thought for the body, because it is the abode of the soul, so we must pay heed to the written laws. If we keep and observe these, we shall gain a clearer conception of those things of which these are the symbols; and besides that we shall not incur the censure of the many and the charges they are sure to bring against us. (*Mig.* 92–93)

With this notion of ritual observance as body and allegorical meaning as soul, Philo has shifted the debate from the *text as text* to the *text as recorded law*. Unlike Plato's body/soul analogy in the *Phaedrus*, in which the text was a body devoid of soul, here observances are

said to be like a body that embraces a soul. Philo's response to the excessive allegorists turns away from any notion of a self-contained 'literal sense' of the text that could be interpreted in independence from the performance of the text as legal injunction. By insisting that the text be performed as well as read, Philo indicates that the 'literal meaning' of the text is not so much discovered as constituted. Equally at odds with Plato's more severe body-soul dichotomies is Philo's insistence that one must 'pay heed' to the written laws by performing them just as one must care for the body by nourishing it. [On the overlap in Philo's orientation between the 'body' of the text and the performance of the law, see chapter 2 (ii). —ed.]

In the larger context of the passage (the fourth gift to Abraham, of a 'good name'), Philo had made one's 'fame,' or good repute in the eyes of others, part of the rationale for insisting on outward obedience to the law. But this is really a secondary feature of his discussion (as his subsequent rejection of it makes clear—see *Mig.* 106 ff.). More central is the way that Philo, having initially shifted from text to performance, then turns his discussion of obedience to the law back in the direction of interpretation of texts, insisting that physical obedience of the text's injunctions is precisely the key to discerning the spiritual, non-literal meaning that the allegorical readers are seeking: 'If we keep and observe these, we shall gain a clearer conception of those things of which these are the symbols' (*Mig.* 93). Philo reaffirms this crucial point at the end of his longer discussion of the fourth gift, where he expresses his hope that 'in the world of sense we may come to find the likeness of the invisible world of the mind' (*Mig.* 105). The allegorical readers that Philo chastises make the fundamental mistake of seeking non-literal meaning by becoming less literal themselves—'as though they were living alone by themselves in a wilderness, or as though they had become disembodied souls'—exactly the reverse of what an allegorical reading intrinsically connected to literal performance requires. The passage from the Genesis commentary had argued that just as speech results from the combination of vowels and consonants, so rational perception of the external world results from a combination of rational soul and body through the mediation of the senses. Similarly, this passage suggests that, just as care for the body naturally enhances the life of the soul, so physical performance of the law leads to spiritual discernment. Both texts concern the movement of perception:

in the Genesis commentary, that movement is from the self-moving rational soul toward the sense-perceptible world; in the treatise on Abraham, the movement is reversed—from the external world via bodily performance to the realm of spiritual insight. But in both cases, the human body and the text's body are instrumental for successful perception.

The third passage to consider comes from the treatise *On the Contemplative Life*. Here Philo draws on the analogy of the body of the text to describe the allegorical practice of a mysterious group known as the Therapeutae:

... [Their] exposition of the sacred scriptures treats the inner meaning conveyed in allegory [*di' hyponoiōn en allēgoriais*]. For to these people the whole law book seems to resemble a living creature [*zōion*] with the literal ordinances [*tas hrētas diataxeis*] for its body and for its soul the invisible meaning [*noun*] laid up in its wording [*lexis*], in which the rational soul especially begins to contemplate [*theōrein*] the things akin to itself [*ta oikeia*], with the result that by looking through the words as through a mirror, it beholds the marvellous beauties of the concepts, unfolds and removes the symbolic coverings and brings forth the thoughts and sets them bare to the light of day for those who need but a little reminding to enable them to discern [*theōrein*] the inward and hidden through the outward and visible. (*Cont.* 78)

Although in this passage Philo is not overtly describing his own allegorical reading, the context makes it clear that he views the description of the Therapeutae as applicable to his own interpretative practice. Here we see that Philo defines the body of the text (its *lexis*, or actual wording) in terms of the laws written down to be performed (*tas hrētas diataxeis*), and that he equates the meaning (*noun*) of those laws with the text's soul. The preceding discussion of the Abraham and Laban passages puts us in position to appreciate the force of the concluding formulation here: that one attains to what is 'inward and hidden' only 'through' (*dia*) what is 'outward and visible.' That *dia* means that what is outward and visible is necessary and of intrinsic significance, and it modifies the otherwise non-intrinsic connotations of 'looking through' the words, or of setting the thoughts of the text (its soul) 'bare' to the light of day. Likewise, the soul's vision here of *ta oikeia* in what it discerns within the body of the text echoes the notion in *On the Migration of Abraham* that the body is the proper 'abode' (*oikos*) of the soul (*Mig.* 93). Hence both Philo's criticism of the 'excessive allegorists' and his praise of the

allegorically adept Therapeutae are grounded in his own insistence on the necessary and intrinsic links between human and scriptural souls and bodies.

III

In his essay on Abraham's migration, Philo had sought to counter the mistakes of excessive allegorism. In Book IV of *On First Principles*, Origen writes to counter excessive literalism, which, he argues, leads to disbelief among Jews, false belief among heretics, and reprehensible belief among simple-minded Christians. All three forms of misreading stem from an inability to discern spiritual meaning beyond the 'bare letter' of scripture (*prin.* 4.2.1–2). In the passage below, Origen elaborates the basic contrast between spiritual meaning and the bare letter by positing, like Philo, a tripartite character for both scripture and human beings:

One must therefore portray the meaning of the sacred writings in a threefold way upon one's own soul, so that the simple man may be edified by what we may call the flesh of the scripture, this name being given to the obvious interpretation; while the man who has made some progress may be edified by its soul, as it were; and the man who is perfect . . . may be edified by the spiritual law For just as man consists of body, soul and spirit, so in the same way does the scripture, which has been prepared by God to be given for man's salvation. (*prin.* 4.2.4)

Origen uses the term 'soul' in two ways in this passage: it represents one of three ways a reader might interpret the text, and it also refers to the site where all three modes of reading have their transformative effect on the reader. This second, more comprehensive use of soul suggests how one is to understand the injunction to 'portray the meaning of the sacred writings in a threefold way upon one's own soul.' Origen is not suggesting that one should carve up scripture into different kinds of passages (as Marcion had done), or parcel out readers into separate kinds of persons (as the Valentinians had done). Instead, he is describing three modes of reading, which in turn are characteristic of the different degrees of spiritual progress that any single reader might attain. The 'threefold' reading reflects the way that God has prepared scripture to educate the whole person—body, soul, and spirit—as that person progresses from a mode of being

oriented toward the body to one oriented toward God.⁸ At the point of deepest spiritual understanding of the text, the divine spirit announces the meaning in person to those who are wise, 'no longer through letters but through living words' (*prin.* 4.2.4). Here Origen echoes Plato's 'living words,' but with a strong commitment to the textual character of those meanings. To 'portray the meaning of the sacred writings in a threefold way upon one's own soul' is not to replace one meaning with another but to 'write in the soul' by reinscribing the soul ever more profoundly with the text.

The coinherence of the three meanings of scripture can be seen in a portion of Origen's *Commentary on the Gospel of John* in which Origen insists, like Philo, that the text of scripture is a single body:

We must, however, approach all the Scripture as one body, and not break or cut through the most vigorous and firm bonds in the harmony of its total composition. This is what they have done who have, so far as it is in their power, broken the unity of the Spirit in all the Scriptures. (*Com. Jn.* 10.107)

This passage comes near the end of a complicated set of interpretations of the Exodus Passover celebration. Origen begins his thinking about the Passover by trying to account for the apparent superfluosity of the phrase 'of the Jews' in Jn. 2:13 ('The Passover of the Jews was at hand'), leading him to distinguish the 'passover of the Jews' from the 'passover of the Lord.' At this point a significant interpretative puzzle arises. Both Paul in 1 Cor. 5:7 ('Christ our pasch is sacrificed') and the evangelist in Jn. 1:29 ('This is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'), when read alongside Ex. 12:5 ('You shall partake of the lambs and the kids'), suggest that the lambs (or sheep) sacrificed in the Jewish Passover are a type or image of Christ sacrificed on the cross. But if so, one should be able to work out the precise correlation or 'conformity' (*akolouthōs*) between the two sacrifices (*Com. Jn.* 10.92).

Yet just here is where the real problems begin. Exodus speaks of many lambs, Paul and John of only one. The Hebrews sacrificed their lambs in obedience to the law; Christ was killed by those who disobeyed the law. And even if one can reconcile such structural asymmetries, there remains the problem of interpreting the more

⁸ See Karen Jo Torjesen, "'Body" "Soul," and "Spirit" in Origen's Theory of Exegesis,' *Anglican Theological Review* 67.1 (1985): 17-30.

specific textual details of the Jewish Passover accounts. 'How, in the case of Christ,' asks Origen, 'shall they "eat the flesh that night roasted with fire, and eat the unleavened bread with bitter herbs"?' (Ex. 12:8). And how is one to interpret all the details of the command in Exodus 12:9–10? 'You shall not eat thereof anything raw or boiled in water, but only roasted with fire. You shall eat the head with the feet and the entrails. You shall not leave any of them until morning, and you shall not break a bone of them; but you shall burn that which is left from them until morning' (*Com. Jn.* 10.93).

Undaunted, Origen proceeds to draw the needed correlations by paying close attention to specific words. He appeals to Jn. 1:14 to link Christ as Word with 'flesh,' then to Jn. 6:53–56 to link flesh with 'blood' (which allows him to make a connection with the blood applied to doorposts and lintels in the Exodus account). Jn. 6:48, 50–51 links Christ to 'bread,' and Jn. 6:51 also links bread to 'flesh.' Having thus tightened the weave in his scriptural tapestry, Origen is able to bind the narrative of the Jewish passover to Christ as its inner meaning. He then moves to the interpretative consequences, built on an implicit identification of the Word of Jn. 1:14 with the words of the text: reading the text allegorically becomes a sacramental act by which Christ as the text's inner meaning (but also as its body) becomes ingested through proper reading. Eating the text 'raw' means taking it literally; eating it boiled leads to vague meaning; instead, one must roast the flesh of the lamb by reading the text with spiritual insight. Likewise, one must eat the lamb (read the text) in a proper order (head first, feet last), and one must eat all of it (not ignoring entrails): like the roasted lamb, scripture read properly is one body. As in the preceding passage from *On First Principles*, here too Origen undermines any simple body-soul dualism even as he exploits the analogy of the text's body in order to make some distinctions that serve to say something not about the 'parts' or 'senses' of the text, but about the spiritual progress of the text's ideal readers.

The seriousness of Origen's investment in the body of the text seems to be called in question, however, by his observation that some texts have no bodily meaning at all (*prin.* 4.2.5). But this is a different use of the term body. As the preceding discussion has shown, all passages of scripture (presumably including those that have no bodily meaning) are parts of a single body. Correspondingly, although allegorical readers of the one body of the text progress spiritually, they never fail to possess their own bodies in one form or another:

Origen's three categories are imprecise points on a continuum in which there is always some 'mixture' of body, soul, and spirit. As the allegorical reader progresses spiritually, the body becomes more and more spiritualized, but it is never simply left behind.

Origen addresses the question of the abiding necessity for the body in the course of refuting the Platonist Celsus's attack on the Christian doctrine of the bodily resurrection of the dead. At first, Origen seems to suggest that the highest aspiration of human life will not require a body: 'in order to know God we need no body at all. The knowledge of God is not derived from the eye of the body, but from the mind which sees that which is in the image of the Creator and by divine providence has received the power to know God' (*cels.* 7.33). If, as Origen has indicated earlier in the text, body is tied to place, and if place is not a relevant category for God, then one needs to read 'bodily' descriptions of God-human relations allegorically, setting aside the categories of place and body altogether:

When the prophet says 'Open thou mine eyes that I may comprehend thy wonders out of thy law,' or 'The commandment of the Lord is luminous, enlightening the eyes,' or 'Enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,' no one is so idiotic as to suppose that the wonders of the divine law are comprehended with the eyes of the body, or that the commandment of the Lord enlightens the bodily eyes, or that a sleep which produces death comes upon the physical eyes. . . . If scripture says the word of the Lord was in the hand of Jeremiah the prophet, or of anyone else, or the law in the hand of Moses, or that 'I sought the Lord with my hands and was not deceived,' no one is such a blockhead as to fail to grasp that there are some hands which are given that name with an allegorical meaning [*tropikōs kaloumenas*]. (*cels.* 7.34)

The two preceding passages appear to lend support to those who would find in Origen's thought a relation between a repudiation of the body and the necessity of allegorical reading. But, as we have already observed, 'body' has more than one meaning in Origen's writings, and here it refers specifically to that aspect of existence that is material and subject to decay: *this* sort of body cannot be required in order to see God after the resurrection. But it would be a mistake to think that this kind of body either constitutes one's personal identity or provides the basis for metaphorical extension in Origen's notion of the body of the text.

In his 'Commentary on Psalm 1.5' (fragments of which are preserved by Methodius of Olympus in his treatise *On the Resurrection*),

Origen describes the following dimensions of a human being: a soul, the essence of which is invisible, incorporeal and changeless; a material substratum (*hylikon hypokeimenon*), which is constantly subject to radical change; and a corporeal form (*eidos*), which 'characterizes' the changing physical 'stuff' of the substratum by giving it persisting 'qualities' (*poietētes*) composed of 'features' (*typous*) such as scars and blemishes, which endure throughout the life of an otherwise changing physical body (Meth. *Res.* 1.22.2–3). At death, the material substratum, insofar as it consists of the material stuff, decays and disappears. But 'body' in this sense never defined the personal identity of the person; rather, such identity was always constituted by soul and corporeal form together, and it was the corporeal form that constituted the specifically 'bodily' aspect of a person's identity. Origen argues that the resurrection effects a transformation of the person by the divine *logos*, such that the formerly mortal corporeal form, unlike the purely physical stuff of the body, becomes immortal: 'the corporeal form [*eidos*] about which we have spoken, although mortal by nature . . . is made alive through the life-giving Spirit and, out of the fleshly, becomes spiritual' (Meth. *Res.* 1.24.4). In this transformation, the essence of the person—which formerly had been constituted by the characterizing power of corporeal form *in the flesh*—will now be constituted by the characterizing power of corporeal form *in the 'spiritual body'*—i.e., the body that results from the divine transformative work of the *logos* on the dead, material body: 'for the holy person there will indeed be a body preserved by him who once endued the flesh with form, but there will no longer be flesh; yet that very thing which was once being characterized in the flesh will be characterized in the spiritual body' (Meth. *Res.* 1.23.3).

With the category of corporeal form, Origen finds a way of doing justice to the inescapably bodily dimension of personal identity without tying that identity to corruptible flesh. His notion departs from Plato's idea of *eidos* in two ways. First, Plato's *eidos* is a general form while Origen's expresses the inner *logos* or principle of an individual; in the case of human beings, such an inner *logos* or principle is precisely what personal identity means. Second, and even more strikingly, Origen makes this *eidos* a principle that, precisely as material, is superior to the material body, distinguishing it (in contrast to Aristotle) from the immaterial soul.⁹ This pivotal concept of corpo-

⁹ Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A.S. Worrall (San Francisco, 1989), 255; see also Dechow, *Dogma and Mysticism*, 318, 382.

real form functions much the way as does Philo's concept of the body as the soul's home (*oikos*): in each case, we have a conception that breaks down any sort of stark body-soul dichotomy.

Both Philo and Origen used the analogy of the body of the text as part of a progressive scheme in which the allegorical reader moves toward greater spiritual and ethical perfection. Although both view this advance as a movement away from a life consumed with sense-perception toward one of direct, non-sensuous contemplation of God, neither bases that ascent on a simple repudiation of the body. There is, correspondingly, no simple disregard for the textuality of the allegorically read text either. On the contrary, Philo maintains the links between allegorical reading, textuality, and the body by tying the very process of such reading to the basic elements of language and to ritual performance, while Origen preserves those links by stressing the continuity of embodied personal identity in the very process of spiritual growth, a continuity represented both by the wholeness of the scriptural text as one body despite many meanings, and by the persistence of the individual's corporeal form in the resurrected state.

The larger scriptural and religious contexts for each thinker's commitment to the body reach beyond the scope of this essay, but one should at least observe that the foundational narratives of Judaism and Christianity, in their embodied, historical aspects, are never far from Philo's and Origen's allegorical readings. Philo's commitment to the body seems to reflect his sense of the pervasive importance of the Exodus story; his criticism of the non-practicing allegorical readers occurs in a treatise on the migration of Abraham, a journey that illustrates for Philo the spiritual import of the historical Exodus from Egypt. Similarly, Origen's commitment to the body seems to reflect his deep engagement with the passion/resurrection narrative: his insistence on the unity of scripture as one body to be read for spiritual meaning replicates at the level of the text the incarnation and resurrection of the embodied Christ. The preceding discussion has offered some reasons for thinking that Philo's and Origen's allegorical accounts of the spiritual import of the Exodus and Gospel narratives were hardly intended to dissolve their literal textuality (or even historicity) into a set of ciphers for Platonism. On the contrary, for both Philo and Origen, allegorical reading was intended to enable the bodies of these foundational texts to shape—and reshape—readers' souls in ways that turned their common Platonic tradition into a context for the fashioning of new identities.

THEOLOGY AND EXEGESIS IN MIDRASHIC LITERATURE

Marc Hirshman

Classic midrashic literature developed principally in the Land of Israel from the first to the fifth centuries C.E. In the composition of midrash (the 'investigation' of Scripture), the Rabbis treated both legal subjects (*halacha*) and non-legal ones (*aggada* or *haggada*). Though in this essay I refer at times to halachic interpretation, my discussion concentrates on aggadic midrash, collected and edited in early anthologies that draw upon this formative period.

For the ancient Rabbis, midrash was fundamental to creative activity. The non-legal literature they developed took not the form of biography, history, epistles, or philosophy. During the centuries when Apuleius wrote the *Golden Ass* and Porphyry assembled the *Enneads* of Plotinus, the rabbinical imagination expressed itself in what a seminal study of midrash has called 'creative exegesis.'¹

Both rabbinic and non-rabbinic sources attest to the broad popularity of midrash among the Jews of antiquity. The Palestinian Talmud records a story of people flocking to R. Yohanan's aggadic expositions. Jerome, depicting what he considered to be the raucous audiences of the synagogue, in effect corroborates such an account.² The midrash itself on occasion registers the response of the Jewish public to such preaching, including laughter, tears, even outright rejection, though there is no indication that anyone in this public questioned the legitimacy of homiletic midrash itself. Admittedly, it

¹ See I. Heinemann, *Darchei Haaggada* (Jerusalem, 1949), pp. 175–7. On allegory in early Jewish literature, see Heinemann's *Altjüdische Allegoristik* (Breslau, 1936). For a more recent treatment of midrash and allegory, see G. Bruns, 'Midrash and Allegory,' in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. F. Kermode and R. Alter (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), pp. 625–46.

² For the Palestinian Talmud, see P.T. *Bava Metzia* 2:11 (8d). For Jerome, see M. Hirshman, 'The Preacher and His Public,' *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 42 (1991), 108–14.

is rare to find within a homily interjections or questions from an audience.³ Nor does the midrash normally display the direct engagement of a preacher with a group of listeners addressed in second person. Yet this does not necessarily mean that midrash developed primarily in the academy, a view increasingly advocated in recent years.⁴ The earlier view that midrash developed primarily in the synagogue may well be correct. For all its intricacies, midrash normally presents broadly accessible arguments, and much of it may have originated in popular addresses of which the anthologies preserve only the central exegetical points.

Midrash never disappeared from Jewish intellectual life. By the Middle Ages, however, rabbinical speculation increasingly included other interpretive forms. The Rabbis of the early medieval period (the Geonim) produced not only commentaries on the Talmud and responsa, but also important works of Jewish philosophy and Hebrew grammar. In contrast to the emphasis on oral literature and communal composition among the ancient Rabbis of the talmudic age, in the geonic period individual authors repeatedly produced tracts and essays under their own names. At times scholars in this later era expressed considerable unease with the flourishes of aggadic midrash and denied it the authority usually accorded to rabbinic writing. They stressed that whatever its possible interest, it did not command acceptance.⁵ Such unease was certainly intensified by the concern to defend rabbinic Judaism against the attacks of Karaites from within and Christians and Muslims from without. Yet polemical attacks on aggada were not new to Judaism; both the Christian Justin and the pagan Celsus, for example, had criticized it in the second century. At least for the ancient Rabbis, aggadic midrash had its own rationale.

'If you wish to come to know him who spoke and the world came into being, study haggada,' reads one of the earliest preserved midrashic

³ It would be possible to contrast, for example, the interventions indicated by Didymus of Alexandria in his school notes from the fourth century; Didymus der Blinde, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes*, ed. G. Binder and L. Liesenborghs, Pt. 1.1 (Bonn, 1978), pp. x-xii. On audience interaction in the modern period, see, for example, the discussion of oral literature in R. Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford, 1970).

⁴ The foremost advocate of this position is J. Fraenkel, *Darchei Haaggada Vehamidrash* (Givatayim, Israel, 1991).

⁵ For an overview, see J. Goldin, 'The Freedom and Restraint of Haggadah,' in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. G.H. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven, 1986), pp. 57-76, with the reference to S. Lieberman's *Shkiin* in Goldin's n. 17.

commentaries, *Sifre Devarim*.⁶ This phrase, 'to know him who spoke and the world came into being' (*lehakir et mi sheamar vehaya haolam*) is extremely rare in the literature of the Tannaim (the Rabbis of the generations just after the destruction of the Second Temple). Elsewhere in Tannaitic literature the phrase refers to the decisive event at the Red Sea in which the Children of Israel recognized their God. It seems that the late antique Rabbis who were called 'expounders of aggadot' (*dorshei haggadot*) believed that aggadic investigations could provide not just knowledge, but an immediate recognition of God.

Such a recognition, however, entailed radically reworking the very words of God in Scripture. It is true that midrash sometimes offers what has been called 'pure exegesis.'⁷ But frequently midrashic interpretation completely rearranges or even reverses the apparent sense of the scriptural text. Its flexibility has been neatly expressed in a contrast between midrash and paraphrase. If paraphrase is saying the same thing with other words, so the argument goes, midrash is saying something else with the same words.⁸ To display that 'something else,' midrash exhibits a breathtaking array of exegetical maneuvers, ranging from repointing the vowels of a biblical word to rewriting the script of a scriptural narrative. [On the configurations of Scripture in midrash, see chapter 2 (iii). —ed.] Perhaps a few brief examples from a celebrated compilation edited about the end of the fifth century, *Genesis Rabba*,⁹ can provide a preface to some of the dimensions of ancient midrash.

'*Ayeka*?'—'Where are you?'—calls God to Adam at a decisive moment in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:9). For the Rabbis, that word/question can be 'pointed' in more than one way.¹⁰ The midrash in *Genesis Rabba* reads the four letters (*AYKH*) of the unpointed scriptural text not as a form of *ayeh* ('where,' the conventional meaning, with *ka* indicating the second person), but as a form of another word with

⁶ See *Sifre Devarim*, piska 49, in *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy*, trans. Reuven Hammer (New Haven, 1986), p. 106.

⁷ See G. Vermes, *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies* (Leiden, 1975), pp. 62–3. Vermes attempted to distinguish between 'pure exegesis' and 'applied exegesis,' the latter more fanciful and less immediately related to the text's real exegetical problems.

⁸ I owe this argument to Beeri Zimmerman.

⁹ For citations from *Genesis Rabba*, see *Genesis Rabbah*, trans. H. Freedman, in Vols. I and II of *Midrash Rabbah*, trans. under the editorship of H. Freedman and M. Simon, 10 vols. (1939; rpt. London, 1961); citations in the essay include some adjustments in translation.

¹⁰ See the brief treatment in my study, *A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity*, trans. B. Stein (Albany, N.Y., 1996), pp. 3–5.

the letters *AYK* (*eich*, meaning 'how'). 'How (*eich*) has this happened to you?' reads one such midrash. 'Yesterday [you followed] my judgment, and now the judgment of the serpent. . . .' But the interpretive turn passes beyond a mere shift of sound and sense. The following midrash in the same collection quotes R. Abahu in the name of R. Yosi b. R. Hanina:

But like a man (*adam*) they have broken the covenant [Hosea 6:7]. 'But like *adam*'—like the first Adam. Just as I led the first Adam into the Garden of Eden, and I commanded him, and he transgressed my commandment, and I punished him with expulsion and exile, and I lamented him with '*eicha*' . . . so also did I bring his descendants into the Land of Israel, and I commanded them, and they transgressed my commandment; I punished them with expulsion and exile, and I lamented them with '*eicha*' [Lam. 1:1]. (*Gen. Rab.* 19.9)

The word *eich* insistently recalls the text of Lamentations, which opens with the anguished expression '*Eicha*.' Envisioning in the story of Eden the saga of Israel, the midrash gives the Genesis account a critical subplot.

At times the subplot takes the form of a 'parallel' story or parable with acutely provocative overtones. Later in *Genesis Rabba*, the midrash quotes R. Shimon b. Yohai, who flourished in the mid-second century, on Gen. 4:10 ('The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground'):

It is difficult to utter the word and impossible for the mouth to express it. [It is comparable] to two athletes who were wrestling before the king. If the king wanted, he could separate them; if he did not want to separate them, the one would overcome the other and kill him, and he [the one overcome] would scream, 'Who will demand my justice before the king?' In the same way, 'The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.' (*Gen. Rab.* 22.9)

The parable is disturbing in more ways than one. R. Shimon was himself a fugitive from the bloody Roman suppression of the Bar Kochba revolt. In this midrash, he points accusingly at 'the king' who callously looks on while he could have intervened to prevent the killing. The midrashic voice here seems almost to join the voice of Abel calling out in distress to God.

At still other times midrash 'reads into' the text of Scripture in an effort to read into the souls of its characters. A later example from *Genesis Rabba* suggests something of the lighter touch of such midrashic 'investigations.' Scripture indicates that when Laban heard

of Jacob's arrival, 'he ran to meet him, and he embraced him, and he kissed him And he [Jacob] told Laban all these things' [or 'all these words,' *kol hadevarim haele*] (Gen. 29:13). The midrash exposes Laban's 'motives' in a form of rewriting that has been called 'homiletic narrative':

He [Laban] said, 'Eliezer [the servant of Abraham] was the dregs of the household, and it was written of him, 'And the servant took ten camels' [Gen. 24:10]. This one [Jacob], who is the beloved of the household, how much the more?' When he [Laban] did not see any satchel, 'he embraced him,' saying 'maybe they are dinars and they are on his waist.' When he did not find anything, 'he kissed him,' saying 'maybe they are gems and they are in his mouth.' Jacob said to him [Laban], 'What do you think—that I came carrying money? I came carrying only words'—'And he told Laban all these words [things].' (*Gen. Rab.* 70.13)

The midrash turns the very 'words' of the biblical text into touch-points for the workings of the mind.

Such brief passages only suggest much broader phenomena. At times the midrashim interpret Hebrew words as if they were transcriptions of Greek words, or treat metaphorical expressions literally, or read questions as declarative statements, or identify anonymous figures in one scriptural book with celebrated characters from another, or invent comments by God regarding the course of events. What principles legitimated the radical liberty with which the Rabbis investigated Scripture?

A systematic exploration of that question, it should be stressed, would require a study of interpretation in the late antique world far beyond the limits of this essay. Such a study would include, for example, an analysis of the complex issue of relationships between rabbinic and Greco-Roman interpretive techniques and terms, ranging from 'juxtaposition' (Hebrew *hekesh* and Greek *parathesis*) to the assessment of words according to the numerical value of their letters (Hebrew *gematria*, from Greek *geōmetria*). [On *gematria* in the much later designs of medieval Kabbalah, see chapter 12 (i) and the conclusion of chapter 13. —ed.] Since the discussion about half a century ago of Saul Lieberman, who closely associated rabbinic *mashal* ('parable') with Greek *hyponoia* ('under-sense') and *allēgoria*, that question continues to be an intriguing and elusive subject of investigation.¹¹

¹¹ For Lieberman's discussion, see *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1950),

Similarly, a detailed attempt to situate midrashic literature would involve a careful examination of generic and stylistic distinctions. Is it more useful, for example, to compare aggadic elaboration with forms of imaginative embellishment similar to the Greek model of *mythos* or with forms of conceptual investigation similar to the *problematika* literature of the ancient world? [On related issues of form in Philonic commentary, see chapter 2 (ii) —ed.] It has been argued that this question largely divides contemporary scholarship on the subject.¹²

Still further, an extended account of midrashic interpretation would entail a comparative analysis of attitudes among both the Rabbis and Alexandrian Jews regarding the 'literal' sense of Scripture and the conditions of interpretive transfers. About half a century ago, for example, I. Heinemann argued in his fundamental work on aggada that rabbinical allegory almost always followed established biblical metaphors (e.g., 'woman' as 'wisdom'), whereas Philonic allegory proposed new and external referents (e.g., *logos* and Platonic Ideas).¹³ Heinemann also held that when the Rabbis added another level of interpretation, they normally did not abandon the literal sense, whereas Philo, despite his respect for the literal sense,¹⁴ at times rejected it as impossible. [On Philo's orientation toward the 'literal' sense, see chapter 4. —ed.] Nonetheless, Heinemann continued, even the Rabbis abandoned the literal sense if they considered that necessary to pre-

pp. 60–78. Among a host of more recent treatments, see, e.g., W. Sibley Towner, 'Hermeneutical Systems of Hillel and the Tannaim: A Fresh Look,' *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 53 (1982), pp. 101–35; L. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* (Princeton, 1993), p. 35; and the thought-provoking essay by Stephen J. Lieberman, 'A Mesopotamian Background for the So-Called Aggadic "Measures" of Biblical Hermeneutics?' *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 58 (1987), pp. 157–225. It may be noted that only one interpretive 'device' was actually called by its Greek name in Tannaitic literature, *notarikon* (the interpretation of a word as if letters in it were 'shorthand' for a number of words). Though the Greek-based term *gematria* was used in the (later) Babylonian Talmud to refer to the numerical evaluation of letters, in Palestinian sources this technique was called by the Hebrew term *minyan*. See Fraenkel, *Darchei Haaggada*, cited above in n. 4, pp. 132–5. On the term *gematria* and its etymology, see Stephen J. Lieberman, 'A Mesopotamian Background,' pp. 173–4, with nn. 63 and 72.

¹² See A. Kamesar, 'The Narrative Aggada As Seen from the Greco-Latin Perspective,' *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 45 (1994), 52–70.

¹³ See *Darchei Haaggada*, cited above in n. 1, pp. 151–61.

¹⁴ Among many studies in recent decades arguing that in general Philo did not disparage the literal sense, see, e.g., P. Carny, 'Philo Alexandrinus' Theory of Allegory,' Diss. Tel Aviv University 1978 [Hebrew], who cites an extensive range of material. It nonetheless seems to me that Philo's difficulties with the literal sense are deeper than this argument suggests.

serve certain views of Israel, God, or morality.¹⁵ It can be strongly argued, however, that rabbinical questions about the literal sense differed markedly in spirit from those of Philo. The aggada broadly stresses interpretive diversity, and it is very rare to find among the Rabbis a unanimous denial of the literal sense. Even the famous passage in the Babylonian Talmud (B.T. *Shabbat* 55b) in which R. Yonatan emphatically declares that Reuben, David, and others never actually sinned can be understood rhetorically as a reversal of the text similar to the Greek exercise of *palinodia*.¹⁶ From one point of view, the only real difficulty with a verse for the Rabbis was the possibility that it apparently contradicted another verse.

Research into these and a host of related topics remains extremely important. In this essay, however, I would like to explore mainly some revealing attitudes expressed by the Rabbis themselves toward the language of Scripture. In the process, perhaps I can suggest at least some of the theological and exegetical implications of rabbinic midrash. [On attitudes toward language in late antique polytheist, Jewish, and Christian interpretation, see chapters 3 and 4. —ed.]

One of the signal achievements of the academic study of midrash over the last 150 years is the clear and striking delineation of the two exegetical schools of R. Akiva and R. Yishmael. R. Akiva treated the language of the Torah as divine in a radical sense. For him, not only were apparently redundant words in the text significant; so was every letter of it. By contrast, R. Yishmael held that the Torah was given in 'the language of people (*benei adam*),' and he abstained from ascribing significance to apparently superfluous words. These two different attitudes informed two different technical vocabularies that distinguished the two schools at least in their legal exegesis.

An attempt to correlate systematically the theology and the exegesis of each of these schools was undertaken several decades ago by A.J. Heschel in *Tora min Hashamayim* ['Torah from Heaven'].¹⁷ Heschel's approach had limitations that left it open to sharp criticism in academic circles. His work was less philological-historical than phenomenological; it did not sufficiently consider source-critical problems; and it did not adequately distinguish between ancient and

¹⁵ See *Darchei Haaggada*, pp. 153–8.

¹⁶ See E.E. Halevi, *Olama shel Haaggada* (Tel Aviv, 1972), pp. 213–30.

¹⁷ See Heschel, *Tora min Hashamayim Beaspeklaria shel Hadorot*, 2 vols. (London and New York, 1962–5), with the posthumous vol. 3 (Jerusalem, 1995).

medieval texts. His approach has been dismissed as his own theology, projected onto rabbinic literature.¹⁸ Yet for all the limitations of his work, I believe he offered basic insights into the distinction between 'Torah from heaven,' expressing every detail of Jewish law in divine terms, and 'Torah from Sinai,' providing only the general principles of that law in a human idiom.

Heschel's position has been complemented in more recent work by S. Safrai, who has agreed with the view that for R. Akiva the Torah is divine in form as well as content, and who has described R. Akiva's exegetical program as 'aspiring to a religio-mystical conception of the unity of Torah.' This conception led R. Akiva away from the notion of an oral law given to Moses at Sinai, since the written Torah was all-inclusive.¹⁹ Though the extent to which R. Akiva's perspective really diverged from that of R. Yishmael has been called into question,²⁰ perhaps even a few passages can suggest something of their diverse approaches to scriptural language and the implications of such differences.

'And all the people saw the thunderings,' declares the Exodus account of the revelation at Sinai (Exod. 20:15).

They saw what was visible and heard what was audible—these are the words of R. Yishmael. R. Akiva says: *they saw and heard what was visible. They saw a fiery word* coming out from the mouth of the Almighty, and it was engraven on the tablets, as it says: 'The voice of the Lord hewed out flames of fire' [Ps. 29:7].²¹

For R. Akiva, the divine 'voice' at Sinai was both heard and seen. The very word of God was fiery, like the depiction of God in various passages of Scripture. In effect, God's word was incandescent with his revelation, an extension of himself.

¹⁸ See E.E. Urbach, *The Sages*, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 695, n. 20.

¹⁹ See Safrai, *Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef, Hayav Umishnato* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 57, and Safrai, 'Halacha Lemoshe Misinai,' in *Mehqerei Talmud*, ed. Y. Sussman and D. Rosenthal (Jerusalem, 1990), p. 19, with pp. 30–1 and 33. Over a century ago, M. Joel noted R. Akiva's turn regarding the oral law; see Joel, *Blicke in die Religionsgeschichte*, I (Breslau, 1880), 52–3.

²⁰ See J. Harris, *How Do We Know This?* (Albany, 1995), chs. 2–3. Harris's discussion of the Babylonian Talmud's use of the phrase, 'The Torah spoke in human language,' is valuable, though I think his attempt to minimize the distinction between the two schools is unsuccessful.

²¹ See *Masechta Bahodesh*, ch. 9, in *Mekilta De-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. and trans. J. Lauterbach (1933; rpt. Philadelphia, 1976), II, 266; my italics.

The sense of fire in R. Akiva's approach to God and revelation reflects not only the idiom of Scripture. As the investigations of D. Hoshen and E. Wolfson have shown, the association of God and his word with fire repeatedly marks Jewish views of revelation from the period of the Second Temple to the development of medieval Kabbalah.²² The oldest surviving apocalypse of the Second Temple period speaks of 'the flaming fire' that surrounded 'the Glorious One' and the 'great fire' that stood before him. 'And the Lord called me with his own mouth and said to me, "Come near to me, Enoch, and to my holy Word."' ²³ To appreciate the radical quality of God's 'fiery' voice for R. Akiva, it might be useful to recall a passage from the Alexandrian allegorist Philo. As Heschel noted, Philo also commented on the 'fire that streamed from heaven' during the revelation at Sinai. But Philo wrote of how 'the flame became articulate speech in the language familiar to the audience' and how the people 'seemed to see rather than hear' the words formed by the flame.²⁴ Aside from Philo's further speculations about other senses of this fire, his use of the term 'seemed' (*dokein*) perhaps suggests a certain distancing from the perceptible image of the text. For R. Akiva, no such distance separated that voice from the vision of divine luminosity.

From R. Akiva's perspective, the voice of God was thoroughly suffused with his presence. In communicating the Torah to Israel at Sinai, Moses exactly replicated the tone of this voice.²⁵ Later engagements with the divine word offered the opportunity to encounter God's all-encompassing revelation. The revelation at Sinai included 'the Torah, its laws, its fine points, and its explanations.'²⁶ Its plenitude of meaning was available in the particulars of the written text, awaiting the exposition of the exegete.

The implications of R. Akiva's position did not please everyone. Later talmudic Sages claimed that R. Akiva interpreted 'mounds' of

²² See D. Hoshen, 'Torat Hazimzum,' *Daat*, 34 (1995), 33–60, and E. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 13–51.

²³ See 1 Enoch 14:21–4, quoted by Wolfson, p. 30, who also cites related views from the Second Temple period.

²⁴ See Philo of Alexandria, *On the Decalogue* (*De Decalogo*) 46, in *Philo*, Vol. VII, trans. F.H. Colson (London, 1937), p. 28. For Heschel's reference to the passage, see *Tora min Hashamayim*, I, 255, n. 6.

²⁵ See *Mekilta De-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. and trans. Lauterbach, cited above in n. 21, II, 223.

²⁶ See *Sifra Bechukotai*, ed. I.H. Weiss (1862; rpt. New York, 1907), *parasha* 2, p. 112c.

laws on the basis of the written flourishes attached to the letters of Scripture (B.T. *Menahot* 29b). [On forms of 'hyperliteral' interpretation in later, Kabbalistic commentary, see chapter 13. —ed.] It is illuminating that this portrayal of R. Akiva's exegesis is itself an interpretive play on a phrase, 'his hair is curly' (Song of Songs 5:11), that was taken to be a description of God (B.T. *Erwin* 21a). No extant evidence shows that R. Akiva actually interpreted the crowns of letters,²⁷ but he famously attributed meaning even to the two-letter Hebrew word *et*, which simply marks the accusative case. He was upbraided for arguing that an apparently extraneous letter (Hebrew *V*, which can also mean 'and') in a particular scriptural passage indicated that the injunction stated in the passage applied also to another case (B.T. *Sanhedrin* 51b). When he interpreted the mystical vision of the heavenly thrones in Dan. 7:9, he was also rebuked for his treatment of aggada. 'Akiva,' complained his colleague R. Elazar b. Azariah, 'what are you doing with aggada?' Akiva should confine himself, indicated R. Elazar, to intricate legal issues.²⁸

Yet on both aggadic and legal subjects the force of R. Akiva's exegetical drive was penetrating. He could declare, for example, that while all of Scripture was holy, the Song of Songs was 'holy of holies' (Mishna *Yadayim* 3.5). So sacred was the Song of Songs in his view that he even denounced those who chanted it at wedding celebrations.²⁹ His influential student R. Meir held that the Song of Songs was originally expressed at the Tabernacle itself, when God dwelled among the people of Israel in the desert.³⁰ On a matter of halachic controversy, R. Akiva could provide a view about conditions regarding the Temple service that his colleague R. Tarfon claimed was more accurate than Tarfon's own eyewitness account:

²⁷ On this point I am indebted to my colleague M. Kahana.

²⁸ See B.T. *Hagiga* 14a and B.T. *Sanhedrin* 38b. On the rabbinical use of the word *aggada* at times to indicate specifically mystical exegesis, see my study, 'The Place of Aggada and Who Were the Baalei Aggada?' in the forthcoming memorial volume for E.E. Urbach.

²⁹ See *Tosefta Sanhedrin* 12:10. I have associated the original phrase 'houses of drinking' with wedding celebrations, as this is a common idiom in Tannaitic literature. Compare *Tosefta Megila* 3:15.

³⁰ See *Song of Songs Rabbah*, trans. M. Simon, 1.2, pp. 20–1, in Vol. IX of *Midrash Rabbah*, cited above in n. 9.

Tarfon saw and forgot; Akiva expounds on his own and accords with the law. One who departs from you is as one who departs from life.³¹

His sense of a Scripture dazzling with the 'fire' of God promoted a style of exegesis that dazzled and fascinated other interpreters in turn. According to a famous ancient legend, Moses himself could not comprehend the teachings of R. Akiva (B.T. *Menahot* 29b).

A passage in *Sifre Devarim* that reflects on midrashic activity itself implies some of the attractions and tensions of such a style. I referred to part of the passage earlier, but by this point perhaps it has acquired greater resonance. 'Is it possible for a human to ascend to heaven and cleave to fire, seeing that Scripture has said, 'For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire' [Deut. 4:24], and 'His throne was fiery flames' [Dan. 7:9]? Rather, cling to the Sages and to their disciples, and I will account it to you as if you had ascended to heaven and had received it [the Torah] there. . . .' After completing the comment, the midrash continues with a further, daring claim, attributed to the 'expounders of aggadot' themselves. 'The *dorshei haggadot* say: If you wish to come to know him who spoke and the world came into being, study haggada, for thereby you will come to know him and cling to his ways.'³² The first comment, questioning the possibility of ascending to heaven and cleaving to fire, recommends clinging to the Sages. But the 'expounders of aggadot' argue that the study of haggada offers the opportunity to know God himself and cling to his ways. To know him (*lehakir oto*): it is striking that this rare phrase is attributed to R. Akiva in a highly charged mystical interpretation of the Song of Songs, where he portrays Israel as 'speaking the beauties and praises of him who spoke and created the world.'³³ For R. Akiva and the expounders of aggadot, Israel could know God not only in historic experiences at the Sea and at Sinai, but also in the midrashic reading of Scripture.

Given the boundless expanse of the divine word, could there be restrictions and rules in midrashic reading? Only once in the surviving literature does R. Akiva object to an aggadic interpretation.

³¹ See *Sifre Num.* 75, in *Siphre d'be Rab*, ed. H.S. Horovitz (1917; rpt. Jerusalem, 1966).

³² See *Sifre Devarim*, *piska* 49; my translation is adapted from that of Hammer, cited above in n. 6, p. 106.

³³ See *Masechta d'Shirta*, ch. 3, in *Mekilta De-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. and trans. Lauterbach, cited above in n. 21, II, 25-7.

It is apparent that what arouses his vehement opposition to this particular interpretation, expounded by R. Papias, is its Gnostic content.³⁴ With regard to content of a different kind, midrash does not systematize levels of interpretation in the manner of Origen. [On such systematization, see chapter 4. —ed.] At least in the school of R. Akiva, however, it entails a sense of interpretive levels, with mystical studies reserved for the elite. At the same time, R. Akiva's approach to exegetical creativity resists strict codification. The people of Israel, he declared in a famous statement, were given the 'vessel with which the world was created.'³⁵ That vessel is the Torah, or the word of God,³⁶ and R. Akiva portrays it as an instrument entrusted to Israel's hands. The sense of working with that divine instrument, an expression of the infinite Creator, informs the expansive exuberance of midrash in the centuries after R. Akiva.

No collection of exegetical rules is attributed to R. Akiva. By contrast, a famous set of such principles is attributed to R. Yishmael. It is revealing that this set of thirteen principles of halachic exegesis was attached as a preface to a midrashic collection authored in the school of R. Akiva. Perhaps the position of the school of R. Yishmael that the Torah was written in the language of people encouraged the attempt to specify the norms and codes of exegesis. In any case, perhaps even a brief glance at a term used in an aggadic context can suggest something of the attitude of this school regarding human conventions in scriptural figuration.

The term involves the act of naming itself. It appears, for example, in the first section of *Sifre Devarim*, a section that may well come from the school of R. Yishmael and that includes a discussion about the orientation of certain scriptural books. According to this discussion,

³⁴ The source for this debate is *Masechta d'Vayehi*, ch. 7, in *Mekilta De-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. and trans. Lauterbach, I, 246–9. The text in a more nearly pristine form that was not available to Lauterbach is preserved in an ancient Geniza fragment, published by Z. Rabinovitz in *Ginzei Midrash* (Tel Aviv, 1976), pp. 8–9, esp. n. 63. See also A. Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*, Pt. II, *Essays in Anthropomorphism* (1937; rpt. New York, 1968), pp. 43–7. For a discussion of the debate, see M. Kahana, 'The Critical Edition of Mekilta De-Rabbi Ishmael in the Light of the Genizah Fragments,' *Tarbiz*, 55 (1986), 499–524 [Hebrew].

³⁵ See *Avot* 3:14 (in many printed editions, 3:18). The printed editions add to 'vessel' the word 'coveted,' but it is missing in the Kaufmann and Lowe manuscripts. See *Faksimile-Ausgabe des Mischnacodex Kaufmann A 50*, ed. G. Beer ([1929]; rpt. Jerusalem, 1968), and W.H. Lowe, *The Mishna on Which the Palestinian Talmud Rests* (1883; rpt. Jerusalem, 1957).

³⁶ See *Avot* 5:1: 'With ten utterances the world was created.'

Ecclesiastes is a book of 'chastisement' or 'admonishment.'³⁷ 'Whence do we know that they were words of admonishment? For it says, "The sun rises and the sun sets," etc. . . . "All streams flow into the sea." He named (*kina*) the wicked with the sun and the moon and the sea, which have no reward.'³⁸ Just as these elements of nature gain no reward, so do the wicked gain none. In effect, the interpretation treats the opening part of Ecclesiastes, which portrays the cyclical monotony of the natural world, as a moral allegory.

The term *kina* is relatively rare. In the Bible it basically meant the giving of an epithet or cognomen.³⁹ In a famous passage in *Sifre Devarim* (with a parallel in a work from the school of R. Yishmael, the *Mechilta*), it belonged to a phrase that indicated biblical passages in which a grammatical change was made to avoid sullyng God's honor.⁴⁰ In later rabbinic literature it designated the use of a euphemism.⁴¹ I wish only to call attention to another use of the term in the *Mechilta*. The work is arguing that scriptural language involves an accommodation to human needs. It quotes, for example, part of the passage in which the prophet Amos declares:

The lion hath roared,
Who will not fear?
The Lord God hath spoken,
Who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:8)

The commentary proceeds: 'And who gave strength and force to the lion? Was it not he? But it is merely that we describe (*mechanim*, from the same root as *kina*) him by figures known to us from his creatures, so that the ear may receive it in accordance with its capacity to hear [literally, "to break the ear"]'.⁴² The prophet, that is,

³⁷ On such a treatment of Ecclesiastes, compare Jerome, Letter CVII, in *Letters and Select Works*, trans. W.H. Fremantle, with the assistance of G. Lewis and W.G. Martley, Vol. VI of *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd ser., trans. under the editorial supervision of P. Schaff and H. Wace (1893; rpt. Grand Rapids, Mich., 1979), p. 194.

³⁸ See *Sifre Devarim*, *piska* 1; compare the translation of Hammer, cited above in n. 6, p. 24: 'Solomon uses here the sun, the moon and the sea to represent the wicked.'

³⁹ See S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1972), p. 487.

⁴⁰ On the phrase, *kina hakatu*, see Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, pp. 30-3, whose translation is 'used a euphemistic expression,' and Heschel, *Tora min Hashamayim*, II, 375-7.

⁴¹ See J.N. Epstein, *Mavo Lenusach Hamishna* (Tel Aviv, 1964), p. 677.

⁴² The translation is adapted from *Mekilta De-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. and trans. Lauterbach, cited above in n. 21, II, 221.

needed to intimate the Creator indirectly by reference to his creation. From this perspective, R. Yishmael's legal principle that the Torah was written in the language of people had its aggadic extension.⁴³ Accordingly, it might be argued that Scripture operated with the conventions of language at large. For the school of R. Yishmael, the opening of Ecclesiastes could be interpreted allegorically, and even certain legal texts in Scripture might be read metaphorically.

If the notion of 'allegory' is aligned with codes of discourse and methods of human accommodation, it can be argued that the school of R. Yishmael was more conducive to 'allegorical' interpretation than the school of R. Akiva, with its ardent sense of Torah 'from heaven.' [For a related contrast between 'conceptual' and 'mystical' approaches in later Jewish interpretation and some of the complications in this contrast, see chapter 13. —ed.] Such critical categories, however, are extremely elusive. R. Akiva's claim that the Song of Songs is 'holy of holies,' for example, contributed to a far-reaching interpretation of the work that has regularly been called 'allegorical.'⁴⁴ Not every exegete who adapted his daring arguments and interpretive styles shared the intensity of his mystical perspectives. Nor is it fully satisfying to propose that R. Akiva is the 'literalist' and R. Yishmael the 'non-literalist' regarding scriptural depictions of God.⁴⁵ Words such as 'literal' are notoriously problematic when applied to the realm of the divine. [On changing definitions of the 'literal' sense, see chapters 1 (iii), 2 (viii), 4, and 11. —ed.]

Yet to assess the conditions of such interpretation it remains critical to investigate the ancient interaction between theological and exegetical developments. The stress by R. Akiva on Torah *min hashamayim* and the emphasis of R. Yishmael on 'the language of people' finally implied not only distinctions regarding the treatment of Hebrew particles. It implied also distinctions regarding the principles of scriptural signification and the status of interpretive acts. R. Akiva's sense of God's 'fiery' word influentially suggested an approach to divine resonance different from the kind suggested by R. Yishmael's sense of human conventions. In the realm of aggada, the expansive forms

⁴³ See Heschel, *Tora min Hashamayim*, II, 376.

⁴⁴ Compare the discussion of D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington, Ind., 1990), pp. 107–8.

⁴⁵ For this argument, see Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*, Pt. II, *Essays in Anthropomorphism*, pp. 29 ff.

of midrash that R. Akiva helped to inspire acquired extraordinary circulation by the third and fourth centuries and exercised a powerful influence on later Jewish interpretation. Even writers of the Church, who included those critical of what they considered Jewish fables, were critical primarily of the Jewish refusal to read the Torah typologically as a prophecy of the coming of Jesus. [On such typological interpretation in the early Church, see chapters 2 (iv) and 6. —ed.] From its early stages, the Church itself adapted many midrashic techniques and even large-scale expositions.

It should be stressed that to speak about this interaction between theology and exegesis in late antiquity is not to say that the Rabbis who developed midrash regularly theorized self-consciously and systematically about their own activity. They tended more to practice it than to analyze it. Nor did everyone completely encourage its practice. A famous text tells of a third-century Rabbi so disturbed by the equivocal discourse of midrash that he asked his son to restrict himself to halachic argumentation (P.T. *Maaserot* 3:4 [51a]). But then neither halacha nor aggada always displayed transparent formulations. I referred earlier to a story according to which R. Akiva's teachings mystified even Moses. Of course, it is not entirely clear just how to take that account. The story, after all, is an aggada. And its inspiration is inseparable from the musings of midrash.

**ALLEGORY AND READING GOD'S BOOK:
PAUL AND AUGUSTINE ON THE
DESTINY OF ISRAEL**

Paula Fredriksen

Bibliographical Introduction

Thirteen New Testament texts—fourteen, if one includes the Epistle to the Hebrews—have traditionally been ascribed Pauline authorship; modern scholars accept as indisputable only half that number. In (possible) chronological sequence, these are 1 Thessalonians, Philemon, Philippians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans. These all date from the mid-first century. A dated but still valuable introduction to this corpus is W. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. H.C. Kee (Nashville, 1975). On the historical figure of Paul, an accessible recent treatment is E.P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford, 1991). Any commentary will treat the passages I have highlighted here.

The fundamental question of Paul's audience has still not been settled. His letters clearly evince Gentile recipients: 1 Thes. 1:9 (his congregation had turned to God from idols); Phil. 3:2 (the Philippians are not circumcised); Gal. 4:8 (formerly you worshipped beings who are not gods); 1 Cor. 12:2 and elsewhere (they had worshipped dumb idols); Rom. 1:3 (Paul anticipates reaping a harvest among the Romans 'as well as among the rest of the Gentiles'). Most scholars still insist, however, that these communities were actually mixed groups of Jewish and Gentile Christians; against this position, see Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven, 1994), esp. pp. 29–41. Were these Gentiles sympathetic to synagogue Judaism, both before and after Paul's contacts with them? This would go far in explaining why Paul can so unselfconsciously presuppose their familiarity with the Scriptures and key religious ideas of Judaism, which provide the building materials of his own message. For: see P. Fredriksen, 'Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope,' *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS 42 (1991), 532–64; against:

see Sanders, *Paul*, pp. 19–25. For the level of Paul's Greek education, which accounts for his facility in using certain exegetical techniques and figures, see A. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Baton Rouge, La., 1977), pp. 29–59.

On Christian typology and allegory in Roman antiquity, an influential early essay is Erich Auerbach, 'Figura,' orig. pub. 1938, trans. Ralph Manheim (from the text published in *Neue Dantestudien* [Istanbul, 1944]) in Auerbach's *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (1959; rpt. Gloucester, Mass., 1973), pp. 11–76, although this essay has been increasingly qualified by more recent studies. See, for example, the perspectives in Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge, 1997), and K.E. Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the 'Plain Sense' of Genesis 1–3* (New York, 1999), pp. 1–94. [For further studies, see chapters 2 (iv) and 4, 'Bibliographical Introduction.' —ed.] On patristic supersessionist theology and hermeneutics, the classic studies are L. Williams, *Adversus Judaeos* (Cambridge, 1935); M. Simon, *Verus Israel: Étude sur les relations entre Chrétiens et Juifs dans l'empire romain (135–425)* (Paris, 1948); B. Blumenkranz, *Die Judenpredigt Augustins* (1946; rpt. Paris, 1973). On Justin in particular, see H. Chadwick's essay, 'The Vindication of Christianity,' in *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford, 1966). On the distortions of anti-Judaism worked by the Pauline exegesis of second- and third-century theologians (and their modern avatars), see John G. Gager, *The Origins of Antisemitism* (New York, 1983).

English translations of patristic texts are available in several multi-volume series: *The Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene Fathers* (rpt. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans); *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press); and *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York: Newman Press). For facing texts with French translation, see *Sources chrétiennes* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf) and, especially for Augustine, with excellent notes, the *Bibliothèque augustinienne* (Paris: Études augustiniennes). For Augustine's work on Paul in the mid-390s, see P.F. Landes, *Augustine on Romans* (Chico, Calif., 1982); for the *Confessions*, two excellent English translations are by F.J. Sheed (London, 1943) and Henry Chadwick (Oxford, 1991); for the *City of God*, see the translation of Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth, 1972).

The premier modern biography of Augustine is by Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley, 1967). On Augustine's secularization of history, see the classic essay by R.A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge, 1970). On the effects

of the Origenist controversy on Latin exegesis, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (Princeton, 1993), esp. pp. 194–244.

The present essay is not about Augustine's semiotic theory as such, which may be seen in his handbook of exegesis, the *De doctrina christiana*. Two valuable essays on his theory of signs may be found in the collection of essays edited by R.A. Markus, *Augustine* (Garden City, N.Y., 1972): 'Augustine on Signs,' by Markus (pp. 61–91), and B. Darrell Jackson, 'The Theory of Signs in St. Augustine's *de doctrina christiana*' (pp. 92–148).

The line I pursue here coordinating Augustine's anti-apocalyptic reading of history, his interpretation of Paul and of Genesis, and his orientation toward Jews and Judaism, is the result of research done over the past several years. Fuller argumentation with more complete bibliography may be found in: 'Beyond the Body/Soul Dichotomy: Augustine on Paul against the Manichees and the Pelagians,' *Recherches augustinienes*, 23 (1988), 87–114, for the trajectory through the works on Paul in the mid-390s; 'Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity: From John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo,' *Vigiliae Christianae*, 45 (1991), 151–83; on the theological status of Jews as witness to the Church, 'Excaecati Occulta Iustitia Dei: Augustine on Jews and Judaism,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 3 (1995), 299–324; on the theological import of halakhah, 'Secundum Carnem: History and Israel in the Theology of St. Augustine,' *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R.A. Markus*, ed. William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1999), pp. 26–41.

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Paul was convinced that he and his generation stood poised on the cusp of a great change, when God would accomplish the definitive conquest of evil through the imminent return from heaven of his Son. Three hundred years later, Augustine was equally convinced that evil rested endemic in human experience and history, and that any resolution lay indefinitely far off. Their profound differences notwithstanding, however, the first-century Jewish apocalyptic visionary and the fifth-century Latin bishop are in some ways temperamental and theological twins. Like planets in opposition, they are brought as close as they can be by the force of their shared question: how can God's constancy and justice as expressed in his dealings with Israel be reconciled with the revelation of Christ? And both offer the same answer: by knowing how to read the Scriptures

kata pneuma / secundum spiritum, which is to say, with spiritual understanding, knowing what the text actually means as opposed to what it merely says.

In the essay that follows, I propose to investigate the ways that each writer uses spiritual interpretation to allegorize Scripture,¹ conforming it to his own passionately held religious convictions. Taking 'allegory'—*allos* / other, *agoreuein* / to speak—in the basic sense of rhetorical techniques for seeing meanings in a text other than what a simple reading would support, I will trace the cultural changes that these authors evince, indeed induce, through their 'spiritual' interpretations of the Bible. As both Paul and Augustine read Scripture in light of their respective convictions about Christ, they struggle with the meaning of Israel imbedded in Scripture—God's speech—as well as with the meaning of history as the place where God speaks. [On notions of 'old' and 'new' orders in history and tensions between them in early Christian interpretation, see chapter 2 (iv). —ed.]

I. Paul and Apocalyptic Transparency

Paul describes himself as a Jew learned in the Law, Pharisaic in interpretive orientation (Phil. 3:5), and enthusiastically observant (Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:6, 'blameless'). Since his experience of the Risen Christ (1 Cor. 15:8), Paul's life had taken an unexpected turn. In the time between that event and the period of the composition of his letters—from roughly 33 to 55 C.E.—Paul had devoted his considerable energies to bringing the good news of Christ's resurrection and impending return to Gentiles, who comprise at least much of the audience of the seven undisputed letters we still have from him.

This revelation convinced Paul that history was in its final act, that he lived and worked within the brief in-between of Christ's resurrection and his triumphant second coming (*Parousia*), when the Lord would descend from heaven to overthrow hostile cosmic powers² and

¹ The Septuagint alone, in Paul's case; the New Testament, including Paul's letters, as well as the Old Testament, in Augustine's.

² 'Then comes the End, when he delivers the Kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule (*archēn*) and every authority (*exousian*) and every power (*dunamin*); 1 Cor. 15:24. For the identification of these entities as astral forces, see *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and adapt. from the 4th ed. of Walter Bauer's German-Greek lexicon by William F. Arndt

finally death itself (1 Cor. 15:26). At that point, the dead would be raised bodily and, together with the living, would be transformed, exchanging 'lowly' bodies for glorious bodies like that of the Risen Christ (Phil. 3:21)—spiritual, imperishable, immortal (1 Cor. 15:44, 54). Until that moment—indeed, in order to achieve that moment—Paul worked strenuously to evangelize the nations, bringing in their 'full number' (*plēroma*, Rom. 11:25) so that they, through the Spirit, might be adopted into the family of God (8:14–23), and Israel itself be finally redeemed.³

On a practical level, this meant that Paul expected his Gentiles-in-Christ to conduct themselves in a particular way. They were to eschew 'the works of the flesh,' which Paul enumerates frequently, heatedly, and in detail: 'fornication (*porneia*), impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing.'⁴ Elsewhere, exhorting them, he summarizes their ideal behavior simply as 'fulfilling the Law.'⁵ To be 'in Christ' these Gentiles are not to become Jews, that is, receive circumcision and convert—Paul is adamant on this point. Yet, in insisting absolutely that they abandon idols while foreclosing with equal passion their option to convert to Judaism, Paul leads these people to a social no-man's-land: in antiquity, only Jews had the legal right to excuse themselves from the cult that normally expressed responsible participation in the life of a city.⁶ Paul has in effect removed these people from their native social map. Through his message, in Christ, they have been relocated: they now stand in the sweep of the coming redemption that God had promised Israel.

and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Cambridge and Chicago, 1957). Rom. 8:38 names, inter alia, angels and principalities; cf. the *stoicheia tou kosmou* of Gal. 4:3, 9, and the *archontōn tou aiōnos toutou* of 1 Cor. 2:8.

³ He implies that this in-gathering of the nations will trigger Israel's final salvation and thus the redemption of the cosmos; Rom. 11:25–26. We return to this point below.

⁴ Gal. 5:19–21; similarly, Rom. 1:18–31, describing Gentile culture in general; cf. 1 Cor. 6:9–11; 1 Thes. 4:4–6.

⁵ Gal. 5:14; 1 Cor. 7:19, 14:34; Rom 8:4; cf. Rom. 2:26, 13:8–10.

⁶ The intrinsic social instability of this arrangement is perhaps an unobtrusive measure of this new group's time frame: no one—and certainly not Paul—expected the quotidian to endure for very long. Ultimately, of course, such anomalous Gentiles were targeted for prosecution by local authorities, in part for their refusal to participate in civic and imperial cult. For a social and historical description of this aspect of the early Christian movement, see P. Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews* (New York, 1999), pp. 129–37.

Christ provides the vanishing point for Paul's new perspective on Scripture. He accordingly can re-read biblical narrative and deploy scriptural images in ways that would have astounded, indeed sometimes offended, Jews outside the new movement. Sometimes his allegorizing is in service of a fairly simple point. For example, exhorting his Gentiles in Corinth to seemly behavior, Paul constructs a sustained metaphor around morality and Passover preparations:

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor. 5:6–8)

'Leaven' as a metaphor for pride is unexceptional. What is interesting here is the image for Christ—the paschal lamb—and the use Paul makes of it. It's late—much too late for the Corinthians to persist in *porneia*. In the language of the metaphor, it's already late in the afternoon just before the Passover feast, and there's still leaven in the house.⁷ For all its Christological motivation, then, the metaphor depends on traditionally Jewish elements (leaven, Passover, matzah), *understood* Jewishly, to work.

Later in the letter, Paul obliquely rebukes the Corinthians for not supporting him materially in his evangelizing work. Suddenly he evokes Deuteronomy to drive home his point:

Do I say this on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses: 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain' [Dt. 25:4]. Is it for oxen that God is concerned? *Does he not speak entirely for our sake?* (1 Cor. 9:8–10)

Paul explains his invoking Torah by applying agricultural metaphors to the work of his urban apostolate. He has sown spiritual good in his community; it is only right that he should reap some of their material benefits. An apostle is entitled to support, because preaching the gospel is like treading grain, or threshing, or (he continues) serving at the Temple, where the priests get to eat as a result of their service (v. 13). Though he ultimately insists that he would decline such support (v. 15), he makes a vaguely halakhic argument

⁷ Paul's Pharisaic deep structure might be surfacing here: I doubt the Corinthians would be as agitated as he is by this image.

that he is certainly entitled to it. What is of interest here is not the details, but the conviction that mobilizes them: Moses wrote, and God legislated, for the sake of people like Paul. Biblical revelation speaks immediately to present circumstance.

How can Paul be so sure? Because, through Christ's resurrection, he knows that he stands at the end of history, and this knowledge clarifies what preceded. The Exodus narrative, accordingly, also takes on a new transparency:

I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under a cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink. *For they drank from the spiritual Rock which followed them, and that Rock was Christ.* . . . [He then synthesizes their several misadventures with idolatry, *pomeia*, insolence and ingratitude, and their subsequent punishment.] Now these things happened to them as a warning, *but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come.* (1 Cor. 10:1–11)

The scope of Paul's revision here is much broader, the implications for his construction of the biblical past deeper, than in our preceding example. There, the apostolic present was the *telos* of the biblical past; here, Christ has been retrojected into the biblical past, newly revealed as an actor in Israel's formation. Further, the past event serves to model, and thus interpret, current ones: it provides a *tupos* ('type') of immediate relevance.⁸ Thus, while the biblical storyline remains intact—Moses and the tribes still travel from Egypt to Canaan—its fundamental significance has altered. The destruction of those ancient sinners who had drunk of Christ in the desert allows Paul to segue into warnings against those eating and drinking of Christ now who might feel similarly tempted by idolatry and its perennial accompaniment, fornication (vv. 14–22).

In Galatians, his most intemperate letter, Paul pushes this appropriation of the past yet further. Arguing bitterly against fellow apostles (themselves, like Paul, Christian Jews) who urge his Gentiles to convert fully to Judaism, Paul again retrojects Christ as a character into the biblical narrative. Here, however, this retrojection wrenches the biblical past directly into the Christian present. This audacious

⁸ *tauta de tupoi hemōn egenēthēsan* (v. 6); *tauta de tupikōs sunebainen ekeinōis, egraphē de pros nouthesian hēmōn, eis hous ta telē tōn aiōnōn katēntēken* (v. 11). On Paul's use of typology and allegory, see the brief but valuable discussion by Karlfried Froehlich, *Oxford Companion to the Bible* (New York, 1993), s.v. 'Interpretation, Early Christian.'

rescripting has immediate polemical value. Paul can assert to his (confused?) audience that his Judaizing Christian competitors do not even understand the true meaning of their shared foundational myth, the calling of Abraham:

O foolish Galatians! . . . Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? . . . Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? . . . Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed' [Gen. 12:3]. . . . Now the promises were made to Abraham and his offspring [*sperma*]. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many; but referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' which is Christ. (Gal. 3:8-16)

Paul weaves antitheses of spirit versus flesh, faith versus the works of the Law, blessing versus curse, into his retelling of God's call and promise to Abraham—a promise, he now urges, that was made not to Abraham's immediate family, nor even to the nation that eventually issued from him, Israel. Redemption and blessing was promised to Abraham and Christ. Gentiles enter into this blessing through the Spirit, by faith, and *not*, urges Paul, through receiving the Law, aligned in his polemic with 'curse' and 'flesh'—precisely where the mark of circumcision would be sealed. The Spirit already enables Gentiles in Christ to cry 'Abba!' (4:6); without any imposition of Law, in freedom, they have been brought into God's household as sons and thus heirs.

To this almost 'midrashic' argument Paul appends a problematic typology (his word is 'allegory') of two wives, two sons, two covenants, and two holy mountains. His earlier terms, especially the antithesis spirit/flesh, polarize this passage, too:

Tell me, you who desire to be under the Law, do you not hear the Law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, and the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory. These women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery: she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia. She corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written,

Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;
Break forth and shout, you who are not in travail;
For the children of the desolate one are many more than the children
of her that is married [Isa. 54:1].

Now we, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now. But what does the scripture say? 'Cast out the slave and her son; for the son of the slave shall not inherit with the son' of the free woman. So, brethren, we are children not of the slave but of the free woman. (Gal. 4:21–31)

Clearly, Paul meant to insult and demean his Christian opponents through this double allegory. Hagar, the first woman, stands both for the Sinai covenant and the earthly Jerusalem. Her children (by implication, Paul's rivals), who persecute the child of the free woman, are slaves: they shall be cast out. But the free woman (Sarah) represents not the flesh or slavery—Paul's code words for Gentile circumcision—but freedom and promise. She is Jerusalem above, the mother of Paul's community. These children, like her son Isaac, though persecuted by Hagar's children, are born of spirit and promise. They shall inherit; they, in Christ, are free (5:1).

Paul's association of circumcision with 'flesh' allows him to conflate the physical act urged by his opponents with other 'works of the flesh' which they, too, would doubtless condemn—*porneia*, idolatry, enmity, and so on (5:19–21). As the Spirit opposes these fleshly works, Paul leaves hanging in the air the implication that the Spirit, on similar moral ground, also condemns circumcision. Again, the polemical context of this letter is quite precise: Paul argues here against rival Christian missionaries, not Jews or Judaism as such. But the force of his re-reading of scriptural history, wherein God's call of Abraham to the Promised Land is a summons to the Pauline mission, seems to disenfranchise much more than his immediate competition. From such a perspective, what value can the Law and circumcision have at all? And if Abraham's blessing goes through Christ to the Gentiles, what then of Israel?

In Romans we find Paul's answer. This letter, in many ways a calmer companion piece to Galatians, is the closest thing we have to a theological position paper from Paul. Written again to a Gentile audience (but one with whom he was not yet personally acquainted),⁹ Romans reviews the question of the value of circumcision and of the Law—indeed, the value of being a Jew at all—in light of God's

⁹ See esp. Stanley Stowers' demolition of the traditional reconstruction of Paul's audience as 'mixed'—that is, comprised of both Jewish and Gentile Christians—in *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven, 1994), esp. pp. 29–41.

recent revelation of his Son and his concomitant plan to establish Gentile righteousness apart from the Law. Minus the goad of active competition and vituperative polemic, Paul can affirm that Jewishness and circumcision are greatly to be valued (*polu kata panta tropōn*, 3:2), that the Law and the prophets bear witness to faith in Jesus Christ (3:21), and that Christians uphold (*histanomen*) the Law through their faith (3:31). Abraham's circumcision is a sign (*sēmeion*) or seal of righteousness by faith (4:11); 'the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good' (7:13).

Nonetheless, strong tensions charge his discussion. Insisting on the Law's goodness, he still maintains that Jews are no better off than Gentiles, since all are under the power of sin (3:9–20). The Law articulates what sin is, but cannot prevent or absolve it (expiation, rather, is achieved through Christ's blood; 3:25, 5:9). The Law itself, though not sin (7:7), is linked intimately with the powers of flesh, sin, and death (chs. 7–8 *passim*). What way out of this impasse?

In ch. 6, Paul develops an elaborate conceit around death and baptism. Through baptism, the believer mimetically recapitulates the death and burial of Christ (6:3–4). The correspondences to Christ's experience continue, now linked with resurrection, one already realized, the other still to be fulfilled. The believer, consequent upon this 'dying,' already 'walks in newness of life' and thus does not sin (v. 4);¹⁰ and he or she is assured, through the union in 'death,' of being united with Christ 'in a resurrection like his' (v. 5). Baptism-as-death releases the believer from his own 'sinful body,' thereby ending his servitude to sin (6:6–8) and also to the Law as the calibrator of sin (7:1–6). This extended metaphor continues through the end of chapter 8, where Paul rises to his letter's first eschatological empyrean: the war against sin, death and decay is already won, but not yet; the believer is already an adopted son, but groans while he awaits the redemption of his body; all the hostile forces separating the believer from God have already been overcome and will be overcome in Christ. Between this now and not yet, history hovers over its ultimate caesura: it awaits the redemption of Israel.

Romans 9–11 both describes and explains how God's recent justification of the ungodly in Christ is consistent with his promises to

¹⁰ The argument continues, vv. 7–22, that being in Christ means one is (also) dead to sin; but by the end of the passage, instead of speaking of Christian 'freedom,' Paul speaks of alternative forms of servitude, to sin or to righteousness and God (vv. 18, 22).

Israel, which are irrevocable (11:28–29; cf. 15:8). Weaving together several paradigmatic examples from Genesis and Exodus of God's control over human history and redemption together with the familiar Hellenistic image of the footrace,¹¹ Paul holds that Christ is himself the *telos* or goal of the Law with respect to the justification of those who believe (that is, the Gentiles, 10:4).¹² Ultimately, God will bring it about (in Paul's view, very soon) that Israel will acknowledge God's plan so that, with the Gentiles brought in, 'all Israel will be saved' (11:26).

But what prevents that acknowledgement now? Paul answers that God has mysteriously hardened Israel in order to create the opportunity for the Gentiles (hence Israel's 'stumbling,' though not falling, 11:11). It is to this end that he reviews God's sovereign choice of Isaac over Ishmael (9:7), Jacob over Esau (9:10–13), his hardening of Pharaoh's heart: all was done with a view toward the divine 'purpose of election' (v. 11), 'so that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth' (Ex. 9:16; Rom. 9:17). So too God exercises his prerogative in these last days, temporarily hardening Israel as he oversees the final act in the history of redemption.

Leaving biblical history to one side, Paul conjures a prophetic image of divine control: God is (like) a potter, humans (like) clay pots. The potter has an absolute 'right' over the clay (*pēlos*), to shape out of the same lump (*phurama*) whatever sort of vessel he will: man cannot second-guess God's plan. 'Who are you, man, to answer back to God?' (9:20).¹³ All will work out in the End, as God has planned (and Paul foresees). 'For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all' (11:32).

Paul's use of extended metaphor and typology, his mobilization of biblical and even halakhic argument in parenetic exhortation, his

¹¹ See Stowers, *Romans*, pp. 304–16, and esp. his comparison with the Homeric footrace which Paul's allusion would have immediately conjured, the funeral games for Patroclus in *Iliad* XXIII.

¹² *telos gar nomou Christos eis dikaiousunēn panti tō pisteuonti*. See Stowers, *Romans*, p. 308.

¹³ Cf. Isa. 29:16 ('Shall the potter be regarded as the clay; that the thing made should say of its maker, He did not make me; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, He has no understanding?'); 45:9 ('Woe to him who strives with his Maker, an earthen vessel with the potter! Does the clay say to him who fashions it, What are you making? or, Your work has no handles?'); 64:8 ('Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.');

Jer. 18:6 ('O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done, says the Lord. Behold, like clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.').

readings *kata pneuma*, crackling with anger in the heat of controversy—all these rhetorical strategies stand in service of his basic conviction, and thus basic orientation toward biblical interpretation, with which he sums up his letter to the Romans: ‘For *whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction*, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope’ (15:4). His clarity on the impending future enabled and encouraged him to read the biblical past as transparent on the present, its actual matrix of meaning. And that present, itself incandescently eschatological, he construed as consistent with the traditions and convictions of his own people, his ‘brothers,’ his kinsmen ‘according to the flesh’ (9:3): ‘For Christ became a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God’s truthfulness in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy’ (15:8).

But this moment passed. Paul’s generation died, and scattered communities very diverse in cultural orientation were left to interpret not only the Scriptures that Paul had interpreted, but also Paul’s message itself. The simple passage of time necessarily works changes in any millenarian movement.¹⁴ But given the way that this particular movement was bound up with textual interpretation, in a culture where rhetorical education marked the measure of social and intellectual achievement, we can sense such changes even by glancing at the literary productions of the developing Gentile communities that saw themselves as Paul’s heirs. Seeing in Paul himself their warrant to read allegorically, these Christians constructed an evangelical hermeneutic that denied the foundation of Paul’s own proclamation: the irrevocable election of Israel and the universality of divine redemption.

II. *The Apologists and Allegorical Transparency*

Allegory as typology dominated post-apostolic Christian readings of Scripture. This typology established a resonance between some event, image or personage in the LXX and a theological claim, usually about Christ. Sometimes the typology simply articulated the theological claim; sometimes it set up a comparison disparaging to the

¹⁴ See John G. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1975).

Septuagintal prototype. In the later writings in the NT canon, for example, the flood story becomes an inferior type of baptism (2 Pt. 3:18–22), the Jerusalem priesthood an inferior anticipation of the eternal priesthood of Christ (Heb. 9:11–28).¹⁵ The Epistle of Barnabas held that the entirety of Jewish Scripture had been misunderstood by the Jews: its intended audience had always been the Church, which understood spiritually, therefore correctly, the moral or Christological meaning of circumcision, fasting, food laws, sacrifices, Sabbaths, and so on (chs. 2–17). Melito, in his Easter homily, read the Exodus story as a prefiguration of Jesus' passion and resurrection: the narrative details of the former reveal, when understood correctly, both the events and the theological significance of the latter.

Typology, of course, does not exhaust the meaning of 'allegory,' which can also connote, for example, the figuration of some sort of philosophical truth. In the mid-second-century treatise of Justin Martyr, the *Dialogue with Trypho*, we have a rich example of both sorts of allegory, where the principles encoded in Justin's Christological reading of the LXX display his intellectual allegiance to philosophical paideia as much as his imaginative zeal when uncovering the typological footprints of Christ in Old Testament narrative.

Justin begins his dialogue by establishing the nature of God and the soul's relation to God: God is 'that which always maintains the same nature in the same manner and is the cause of all other things,' discernible not to the physical eye but to the eye of the soul, which is to say, to 'the mind alone' (iii). He moves rapidly from these assertions (which raise no objection from Trypho, his Jewish interlocutor) to criticism of the Jewish mode of interpreting Scripture. Citing Isaiah on the redemption of the nations (51:4–5, LXX) and Jeremiah on the 'new covenant' (31:31–32), Justin criticises Trypho both for not understanding that a new Law has been given and for poorly understanding the Mosaic 'old law' (xi–xii). 'You have understood all things in a carnal sense' (xiv), observing the law of Moses in a fleshly, literal way, because failing to understand that what seem to be commandments in the Pentateuch are actually disguised allusions to Christ, their true referent. Thus, purification rituals really speak of baptism into Christ (xiv); the Passover sacrifice, of the Crucifixion

¹⁵ An acutely complicated analogy, since Christ thereby serves both as perfect priest and as perfect sacrifice, performing in one sense an act of self-immolation at the heavenly altar; 9:11, 14, 24.

(xl); the meal-offerings, of the Eucharist (xli); the twelve bells on the robes of the high priest, of Christ's apostles (xlii).¹⁶ Biblical legislation that does not oblige allegory must be understood as punitive, given on account of the proverbially stoney Jewish heart (xviii, xxi, xxii, xxvii, and frequently).

The Jews' inability to interpret *kata pneuma*, further, is due not only to their not being Christian, but also to their not being adequately philosophical. The busy deity talking at length with Moses, visiting Abraham at Mamre, wrestling with Jacob at Jabbok *cannot* have been the High God who according to the canons of *paideia* is transcendent and radically changeless. Rather, another God (*heteros theos*) had put in these appearances: the Father's Son, the pre-incarnate Christ (lvi–lxii). Not knowing the true identity of the chief biblical protagonist, the Jews inevitably misread their own Scriptures (cxxvi).

More than the identity of the biblical God shifts under this reading; so too does the identity of the community of revelation that knows him. Justin adduces Isa. 42:1–4 (LXX)—‘Jacob is my servant . . . and Israel is my elect In his name shall the gentiles trust’—to identify the true Israel.

Is it Jacob the patriarch in whom the Gentiles and yourselves shall trust? Is it not Christ? As, therefore, Christ is the Israel and the Jacob, *so even we, who have been quarried out from the bowels of Christ, are the true Israelite race.* (cxxxv; cf. cxxiii)

This last argument justifies allegory through an appeal to empirical verification. Gentiles, Justin suggests, are flocking to (his) church, and not to the synagogue.¹⁷ The turning of the Gentiles had long been foreshadowed as an end-time event; thus, Gentile interest in Christianity proves that Jesus was the Christ (cxxi). A similar argument undergirds his earlier comments on the obsolescence of Jewish carnal inter-

¹⁶ Cf. also the long middle section (lxxiii–cvi), largely on Psalms, where Justin extracts every mention of ‘wood’ or ‘tree’ as a prefiguration of Christ's crucifixion.

¹⁷ In reality, of course, the situation was much more confusing, and at other places in the *Dial.* Justin alludes to the great variety of Gentile Christian churches, insisting that Trypho distinguish his group from the others (e.g., xi, a reference to Christian dualists or gnostics; xxxv, a list of ‘heretical’ Christian teachers and groups). He also disapprovingly mentions Gentiles who convert to Judaism, thereafter striving to live indistinguishably from ‘native’ Jews (xlvii, they are weak-minded; cxxiii), and law-observant Jewish Christians who even prevail upon some Gentile Christians to follow Mosaic law (xlvii).

pretation and observance of the Law. Since the wars with Rome, Jews have been driven from their native land, indeed banned from Jerusalem: they *cannot* fulfill the commandments. And yet they cling to their carnal interpretations, never realizing that the Law they glory in is essentially punitive. Nowhere does their perverse literal-mindedness manifest itself more clearly, or ironically, than in their insistence on circumcising the flesh. Precisely this custom, and it alone, singles Jews out from other people, facilitating their continuing isolation, punishment, and exile—for obduracy, for murdering the prophets, for killing Christ (xvi). Since deprived of their city and land, they, through circumcision, have ironically fulfilled Hosea, becoming a no-people and a no-nation (xviii).

The God who speaks in the Bible is God the Son; the people that is Israel is the Church. Jews who remain Jews will be trampled by a furious Christ when he returns (xxvi). The mandates of the Law were never meant to be taken literally: true circumcision is always and only of the heart (xviii, and frequently); true Sabbath, to rest in Christ (xii). The covenants are in fact discontinuous: 'the Law promulgated on Horeb is now old, and belongs to you alone' (xi). 'There is now another covenant, and another Law has gone forth from Zion' (xxiv). Jewish notions of God, election, covenant, history—all had been profoundly mistaken, the mistake both caused and compounded by the Jews' inability to understand *kata pneuma*. The bright light of Christ now shone over the Jewish past and its record, revealing them for what they actually were: signifiers of the Son and his Church.

III. Augustine and Historical Opacity

Allegory had saved Augustine for the Church. Repulsed by the Catholic fundamentalism of his family, he had been a Manichaean 'hearer' for almost a decade by the time he ventured to Italy. Latin Manichaeism in this period was a radical Paulinist sect; the dualist theology of its members reflected their strenuous effort to make Paul consistent. To this end, they polarized the tensions marking his letters, seeing in his positive statements about the Law, the Temple, or circumcision evidence of later judaizing interpolations. So consistent was their separation of the Law from the Gospel that they repudiated the Old Testament as well. Its unelevating stories of bodily theophanies,

bloody battles and sexual couplings were, literally, too carnal to be believed. If the Catholics in their confusion and hypocrisy chose to keep the Jews' book while themselves not keeping the Law, that was their business. The Manichees, harkening to the Apostle, knew that the flesh and all its works were evil, that the law brought sin and death; they knew that they had been called in the Spirit to newness of life.

Still held by the force of this critique of Scripture and this strong reading of Paul, Augustine found himself in Milan at the height of a renaissance of Platonic studies. Through reading 'some books of the Platonists' he achieved a new understanding of evil: its source was not flesh or matter but, metaphysically, the absence of good, and, anthropologically, the defective movement of the uncoerced will. And by attending the sermons of Milan's Catholic bishop, he understood further how the principles of this philosophy might be applied to a new reading of the Bible:

And it was a joy to hear Ambrose, who often repeated to his congregation as if it were a rule he was most strongly urging upon them, the text *the letter kills, but the spirit gives life* (2 Cor. 3:6). And he would go on to draw aside the veil of mystery and lay open the spiritual meaning of things which, taken literally, would have seemed to teach falsehood. (*Confessions* 6.4.6)

In his early post-conversion writings Augustine praised allegorical techniques of exegesis and applied them polemically against Manichaean interpretations of Genesis.¹⁸ Within three years, however, he again attempted to comment on Genesis, this time *ad litteram*, in order to understand the biblical account of Creation *secundum historicam proprietatem*—'according to its historical character.'¹⁹ This same period saw the staccato composition of various Pauline commentaries: the *Propositiones*, or notes on the Epistle to the Romans; the *Inchoata expositio*, another unfinished commentary, also on Romans; a commentary on Galatians; three substantial essays on questions arising from Romans chs. 7 through 9; and finally, capping this period, and again reviewing Romans 7–9, the answer to questions posed by his old

¹⁸ *De Genesi c. Manichaeos*, begun in 389 before his departure from Italy but not completed until his return to Africa shortly thereafter; in praise of allegorical exegesis, *De utilitate credendi* 2.4 – 3.10.

¹⁹ *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, begun in 393; Augustine's characterization of this project, *Retractationes* 1.18; cf. his remarks in *De Gen. c. Man.* 2.2.3.

mentor in Milan, Simplicianus.²⁰ The Augustine who emerged from this bout of intensive work on Paul went on to develop original, even idiosyncratic, views on the nature of human freedom and divine justice, on the relation of history and revelation, on the relation of the soul to the fleshly body, and even on the relation of Jewish halakhic observance to understanding *secundum carnem* ('according to the flesh'). His interpretive approach to Scripture also, accordingly, changed. [On attitudes toward the relation between body and soul in ancient Alexandrian interpretation, see chapter 4; on some nineteenth- and twentieth-century approaches to the figure of the body, see chapter 19. —ed.]

We can trace the development of these ideas, and consequently of the changing place of allegory in Augustine's approach to Scripture, by attending to some of the details of his work on Paul. In Romans, Augustine argued, Paul had organized the history of salvation into a four-stage process: *ante legem* (before the Law), *sub lege* (under the Law), *sub gratia* (under grace), and the final eschatological stage, *in pace* (in celestial peace).²¹ These stages are at once both objective, communal and historical (the experience of humanity from the time before the giving of the Law at Sinai to the second coming of Christ), and also subjective, individual and sequential (the development of the individual toward the moment of conversion—stage 2 to stage 3—and thence ultimately to final redemption in Christ). On the macro-level, this formulation permitted Augustine to see the Law as a stage of continuing relevance for the individual believer, thus binding into one movement Jewish dispensation and Christian; on the micro-level, it placed at dead center the crucial moment of transition, from under the Law to under grace. How is such transfer effected?

Concentrating on Paul's image of the divine potter in Rom. 9, Augustine initially answered that man *sub lege* must call on God for aid, because otherwise he could not avoid sin. Is this too harsh? *O homo tu quis es*—who are you, man, to answer back to God?²² He then reiterates Paul's metaphor, with a moralizing slant. *Sub lege*,

²⁰ Abbreviations below include the following: for the *Propositiones*, *Propp.*; for the three essays, *De div. quaest.* (from *De 83 diversis quaestionibus*); and for the response to Simplicianus, *Ad Simpl.*

²¹ *Propp.* 13–18. Paul taught so specifically, Augustine says, in order to avoid seeming to condemn the Law (as the Manichees charged he did) or to deny human free will (as the Manichees did).

²² Rom. 9:20–21; *Propp.* 62.

man is a lump of clay, a *conspersio* or *massa luti* out of which God can mold such vessels as he pleases. Until man ceases to live 'according to this lump' (*secundum hanc conspersionem*) he is carnal or earthly. Only once he puts away his carnal self, the 'man of clay' (*homo luti*), can he understand spiritual things. Until and unless he does, piety demands that he hold his peace and not remonstrate with God.²³

Within months, Augustine returns to this passage in Romans, and his ethicizing metaphor begins to give way to a historicized image. In qu. 68.3 of *De div. quaest.* the *massa luti* becomes a *massa peccati*, the penal situation of the species after Adam, through whose sin 'our nature also sinned.' No longer a neutral substratum, the image has a negative valence: not a 'lump of clay' from which good or bad vessels might be formed, but a 'lump of sin' which provides what human material God has to work with.

By 396, this negative image has been reified into a description of a universal, objective state. Responding to Simplicianus, again on Romans 9, Augustine argues that the initiative to move from stage 2 to stage 3, the impetus of conversion, can come only from God himself. Humans cannot effectively will, because they are born in Adam, *una quaedam massa peccati*.²⁴ Sinners complain, but should not dare answer back to God, who is just and fair, though not in any way that humans can perceive or appreciate (*aequitate occultissima et ab humanis sensibus remotissima iudicat*). The historical Paul, as we have seen, used this image to illustrate how God can cast individuals (like Pharaoh or Esau) into certain historical roles as he works out his purpose of election for the ultimate redemption of all. Augustine, pondering the same image, points to God's amazing, mysterious generosity in choosing to redeem *any* from this lump of perdition. Jews, Gentiles, Pharaoh, Paul—all are from this same mass of the justly damned.²⁵ If God in his mysterious mercy gives grace to some, the only appropriate response is to praise his inscrutable decisions.

The universal *massa peccati* is the negative obverse of the Law. Once the exclusive privilege of Israel, the Law is of universal benefit, thanks to the coming of Christ. Here, against the anti-Judaism both of his dualist opponents and of Catholic tradition itself, Augustine

²³ *Propp.* 62.17–23.

²⁴ *Ad Simpl.* I.2.16.

²⁵ *Una est enim ex Adam massa peccatorum et impiorum, in qua et Iudaei et Gentes remota gratia Dei ad unam pertinent conspersionem*; I.2.19.

lifts up the positive things Paul has to say about the Law, and maintains that the Law, because God-given, is and always has been the means to salvation whose *finis* is Christ (Rom. 10:4). We can see how he makes his case by following two of his exegetical strategies: typology, on the one hand, and *interpretatio ad litteram*, on the other.

Typological exegesis, as we have seen, had long been a staple of Christian exegesis of the Jewish Scriptures. It was a technique of Christianization, a way to stake a claim for the Church in the texts of the synagogue; it was also a tool of polemic, since the Old Testament *tupos* was often regarded as inferior to the Christological datum it prefigured.

Augustine's typology was on the one hand similarly motivated: he argues at length, especially against the Manichees, that the entirety of the New Testament, which they claim to revere, is prefigured in the Old Testament, which they revile and repudiate. But unlike the typologies of many of his predecessors, Augustine usually forbears derogatory comparisons when aligning Old Testament images with New. His view of the Law as constant, God-given and good both before and after the coming of Christ affects the tone of his typologies: if the Old Testament is a concealed form of the New and vice versa, then they are each alike in dignity and positive religious value. [On typological structures of meaning and problems in the orientation of the Church, see chapter 2 (iv). —ed.]

For example, in his massive work against Latin Manichaeism, the *Contra Faustum*, Augustine explores in exhausting detail the myriad anticipations of Christ and his Church to be found (if one knows how to read aright) in Jewish Scripture.²⁶ He begins by quoting the Manichees' favorite Apostle against them, citing Paul's enumeration in Rom. 9 of the privileges and prerogatives of Israel, among which is the Law.²⁷ Then his review of the 'most minute details' begins: as

²⁶ 'To enumerate all the passages in the Hebrew prophets referring to our Lord and savior Jesus Christ would exceed the limits of a volume. . . . The whole contents of these scriptures are either directly or indirectly about Christ. Often the reference is allegorical, or enigmatic, perhaps in verbal allusion, or in a historical narrative, requiring diligence of the student. . . . Some passages are plain . . . and even the figurative passages, when brought together, will be found so harmonious in their testimony to Christ as to put to shame the obtuseness of the sceptic'; *C. Faust.* 12.7.

²⁷ Rom. 9:4, cited *C. Faust.* 12.3, where he also mentions Gal. 4:4 ('In the fullness of time God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law') and Rom. 3:1-2, on whether there is any advantage to being a Jew ('Much in every way; chiefly, to them were committed the oracles of God').

Eve was made from Adam's side while he slept, so the Church was made by the blood of Christ which flowed from his side after his death (12.8). Abel, the younger brother, is killed by Cain, the older brother; Christ, the head of the younger people (i.e., the Gentiles), is killed by the elder people, the Jews (12.9). Noah and his family are saved by water and wood; the family of Christ is saved by baptism into his crucifixion (12.14). All kinds of animals enter the ark; all nations, the Church. The unclean animals enter in twos, just as the wicked within the Church are in twos, meaning easily divided because of their tendency to schism (12.15). The ark's entrance is on its side, and one enters the Church by the 'sacrament of the remission of sins which flowed from Christ's opened side' (12.16). Scripture mentions the twenty-seventh day of the month; 27 is the cube of 3, hence typifying the Trinity (12.19). Entering the ark at the beginning of travail, Noah and his sons are separated from their wives; exiting, the couples are together. This prefigures the resurrection of the flesh at the end of the world, when soul and body will be reunited after death in perfect harmony, a marriage undisturbed by the passions of mortality (12.21). 'The scriptures teem with such predictions' (12.25).

Though the Old Testament prefigures the New, it has its own historical reality and integrity, and the symbolic complexity of spiritual interpretation should not obscure the simplicity of biblical narrative: this was Augustine's principle in interpreting *ad litteram*. We see this most clearly in his understanding of the Jewish people and their observance of the Law. Earlier fathers, as we have seen, saw Jewish praxis as the behavioral index of their wrong-headed carnal scriptural interpretation. If Jews had really understood what God has intended by the Law (so went the argument), the last thing they would have done was interpret it literally, thinking that the command to circumcise meant fleshly circumcision, that the food laws meant eating or not eating certain things, and so on.²⁸

Wrong, says Augustine. 'The Jews were right to practice all these things'—blood sacrifices, purity rituals, food disciplines, Sabbath; their only fault lay in not recognizing, once Christ came, that a new era—not a 'new' Law—had begun (12.9). The Law perdured, the same

²⁸ See above, pp. 136–39.

from Moses to Christ (22.6). By keeping it, the entire Jewish people 'was like a great prophet' foretelling Christ not only in word but also in deed (22.24). God, in other words, despite the plenitude of meanings available in Scripture, was no allegorist when giving his mandates to Israel. Whatever else his Torah signified, in the time before Christ, it also prescribed behavior.

Especially that most distinctive and most reviled observance, fleshly circumcision, embodied as an *actio prophetica* the central mystery of Christianity itself. What Paul had designated the 'seal of the righteousness of faith' (Rom. 4:11) marked in the organ of generation the regeneration of the flesh made possible by the coming of Christ in the flesh and his bodily resurrection (6.3). Had Jews understood God's command *secundum spiritum* without performing it *secundum carnem* (as Justin and others would have wished), they would have only imperfectly prefigured the Christological *mysterium* of Incarnation. Further, insists Augustine, Jesus himself was circumcised, kept the food laws, offered at the Temple, and observed the Sabbath; so also Peter, James, Paul, and all the other Jews of the first generation.²⁹ Once Christ came, the Law no longer had to be enacted, since it was revealed in him and in the sacraments of his Church. But the relation of Jewish observances and Christian sacrament is one of continuity, not contrast (19.17). As for the question, 'Who is Israel?' Augustine advised that the name, to avoid confusion, be left to the Jews.³⁰

This insistence on historical simplicity and realism even in prophetic typology gives Augustine's reading of Scripture an intensely dramatic dimension. The Old Testament might prefigure the New, but this is no bloodless correspondence of things signifying with things signified: the actors in the history of Israel remain firmly rooted in their own time even as their actions point ahead to Christ. Consider this rendering, in *City of God* 16.37, of the scene in Genesis 27 when Isaac

²⁹ Augustine especially works out this argument for an historically located, Torah-observant first generation in the late 390s in his work on Galatians and the quarrel Paul reports there over whether Gentiles should be made to keep Jewish practice. See Epistles 28 (c. 394/95), 40 (c. 397) and 82 (c. 405), all addressed to Jerome. For the details of this surprising (and, to Jerome's taste, unnerving) defense of Jewish halakhic observance, see P. Fredriksen, '*Secundum Carnem*: History and Israel in the Theology of St. Augustine,' *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R.A. Markus*, ed. William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1999), pp. 26–41.

³⁰ Epistle 196.8–11.

realizes that he has given Esau's blessing to Jacob.³¹ First Augustine gives the language of the blessing, Gen. 27.27 ff. 'Behold,' says Isaac,

the smell of my son is like the smell of a plentiful field which the Lord has blessed. And may God give you of the dew of heaven and of the richness of the soil, and abundance of corn and wine, and may nations serve you and princes do reverence to you. Become lord over your brother, and your father's sons will do reverence to you. Whoever curses you, let him be cursed; and whoever blesses you, let him be blessed.

Next comes the Christological decoding. Augustine continues:

Thus the blessing of Jacob is the proclamation of Christ among all nations. This is happening; this is actively going on. Isaac is the Law and the Prophets, and Christ is blessed by the Law and the Prophets, even by the lips of the Jews, as by someone who does not know what he is doing The world is filled like a field with the fragrance of the name of Christ It is Christ whom the nations serve, and to whom princes do reverence. He is lord over his brother, since his people [the Gentiles] have dominion over the Jews Our Christ, I repeat, is blessed, that is, he is truly spoken of, even by the lips of the Jews, who, although in error, still chant the Law and the Prophets. They suppose that another is being blessed, the Messiah whom they in their error still await.

Then, abruptly, we stand face-to-face with the historical patriarch:

Look at Isaac! He is horror-stricken when his elder son asks for the promised blessing, and he realizes that he has blessed another in his place. He is amazed, and asks who this other can be; and yet he does not complain that he has been deceived. Quite the contrary. The great mystery [*sacramentum*] is straightway revealed to him, in the depths of his heart, and he eschews indignation and confirms his blessing. 'Who then,' he says, 'hunted game for me and brought it in to me? And I ate all of it, before you arrived! Well, I have blessed him, so let him be blessed.' One would surely expect at this point the curse of an angry man, if this happened in the ordinary course of events, instead of by inspiration from above. Historical events, these, but events with prophetic meaning! Events on earth, but directed from heaven! The actions of men, but the operation of God!

Augustine's construing his typologies continuously, so that the Old Testament and the New conformed rather than contrasted, his insist-

³¹ Translations from the *City of God* are based on *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth, 1972), with some adjustments.

ence on reading Scripture *ad litteram*, 'historically,' and his positive assessment of 'carnal' Jewish praxis, correspond to one of his major theological positions, again defended with reference to Paul, if not derived from him: that the fleshly body is the native and natural home of the soul.³² Arguing this case in his mature reprise of his commentary on Genesis, Augustine urged that God had created Adam and Eve *ab initio* both body and soul together; and that the fleshly body, reunited with the soul, would participate in the final redemption.³³ He was thus necessarily driven back to Paul's unambiguous statement in 1 Cor. 15:50: 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.'

Origen, criticising millenarian Christians and others for a literalist, 'impoverished' understanding of resurrection, had pointed to precisely this verse in support of his view: the raised body would be the subtle body—Paul's *sōma pneumatikon* (1 Cor. 15:44)—by means of which rational beings are distinguished from each other and from the *asōmaton* deity.³⁴ Latin Christians, especially in the face of the Origenist controversy of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, affirmed that the fleshly body would also be saved, but even a diluted dependence on classical *paideia* led them to associate what was most truly human with the soul itself. Augustine, however, in part against Manichaean exegesis that held Paul to denigrate the flesh, moralized Paul's statement: *caro*, 'flesh,' actually stood in for *qualitas carnalis*, an ethics oriented toward the self rather than toward God.³⁵ Hence, for Augustine, the 'spiritual body' anticipated by Paul is the

³² As opposed to a view traditional for both non-Stoic philosophy and Alexandrian allegorists, Jewish or Christian, that the soul lived in flesh as a result of some pre-incarnate error or lapse—a position to which the young Augustine had also subscribed. Augustine most clearly enunciates this later view in his second attempt to comment on Genesis, *De Genesi ad litteram*. On the evolution of this newer position, and its polemical context, see P. Fredriksen, 'Beyond the Body/Soul Dichotomy: Augustine on Paul against the Manichees and the Pelagians,' *Recherches augustiniennes*, 23 (1988), 87–114, esp. 105 ff.

³³ E.g., *De Gen. ad litt.* III.21.33 and IX.3.5 – 11.19, arguing from this that God had always intended *even before the Fall* that humans procreate sexually (else why create Eve?); see the sustained polemic against those who think the fleshly body will not rise, in *De civitate Dei* XXII.

³⁴ See *Peri Archōn* II.10.3.

³⁵ *Propp.* 13 – 18.10; 46.7; *De div. quaest.*, qu. 66.6; also from this same period, in his handbook on exegesis, *De doctrina christiana* I.23.22 – 26.27, on the soul's natural love for the body; cf. *De Gen. ad litt.* X.12.20, where he explains that by 'flesh' Paul intends not 'body,' but those impulses that arise equally from both body and soul that separate man from God.

body of flesh, stripped of its sinful (that is, 'fleshly') impulses once transformed in the Kingdom. And this was as it should be, since souls and bodies were always meant to be together, and together defined what was 'human.'

So also with exegesis. The Bible must be read both for its spiritual meanings (*secundum spiritum*) and for its historical meanings (*ad litteram*).³⁶ As with exegesis, so with biblical Judaism: the Jews had been right to keep the Law *secundum carnem*, literally and not just spiritually, since such was precisely appropriate to the time before Christ. And as with exegesis and with the Law, so with anthropology: humanity was neither soul alone nor soul merely using a body, but both together. And as with all these things, so with typology: Augustine's orientation expressed his conviction that the New Testament and the Old, like soul and body, were intimately, fundamentally, essentially connected. The task of the reader was to see how.

Augustine's principles of exegesis in some ways brought him, though inadvertently, much closer to some of the historical Paul's fundamental positions than were many of the theologians standing between them. This is nowhere more true than on the status of Jews and Israel. Justin, by contrast, representing a common interpretive stance, sees Jews as permanently displaced by the Church, which is the true Israel. For the historical Paul, this would be unthinkable, and the entire second half of his letter to the Romans defends Israel's permanent position as distinguished and beloved by God (9:4–5; 11:1, 28; 15:8). For Paul, Israel's not heeding the gospel is a temporary, unnatural state of affairs brought about by direct divine intervention (11:25: this is a *mustērion*). And he knows this to be so because of his eschatological perspective: Paul sees the true meanings in Scripture because he stands in that generation 'upon whom the end of the ages has come' (1 Cor. 10:11).

Augustine's conviction that Judaism was essentially, uniquely compatible with Christianity, expressed in the typological transparency that he sees between the testaments, aligns him in some ways with Paul. Yet his historical position is intrinsically different: by his lifetime, long centuries stood between Christ's resurrection and his second coming, and indeed, between Christ's resurrection and the closing of the Christian canon. No sense of an impending ending imposes

³⁶ See, e.g., *De doct. chr.* III.10.14 – 27.38 on how to determine both literal and figurative meanings.

clarity on current circumstances; indeed, argues Augustine, the time of the end is unknowable in principle and probably indeterminably far off. The transparency he sees between the testaments, in brief, does not extend outside them. Current events do not clearly conform to a pattern of prophecy; post-biblical history, he insists, is opaque, not revealing the divine plan. [On perspectives regarding historical change in later allegorical theory and practice, see chapters 12 (ii, v–viii), 14, and 17–20. —ed.]

Yet for Augustine, as for Paul, Israel itself remains an eschatological fixed point, positioned by God as the Pole Star of history. To the Jews Augustine imputes an abidingly revelatory function, precisely because they remain doggedly loyal to their traditional observance of the Law. Under all previous foreign powers, including Rome, Jews clung to their own practices; and with the coming of the Church they have remained the same.³⁷ Augustine takes this as a great mystery, a situation caused by God's *occulto iustoque iudicio*.³⁸ And Jews will remain Jews, he avers, until the end of the age.³⁹ Left behind when history, at Christ's coming, surged to a new stage, Jews themselves retain a perpetual eschatological relevance, precisely through their 'carnal' practice, as witnesses to Christian truth.

For Augustine as for Paul, then, the limits of allegory are set by the historical fact of the Jewish people. No matter what the cosmic transformation, impending or distant, no matter what the inner meaning revealed through the spirit in the Law and the prophets, Israel itself abides. As both recipient of revelation and in this sense co-author of Scripture, Israel, for both thinkers, locates God once-for-all in human time.

³⁷ 'It is a most notable fact that all the nations subjugated by Rome adopted the ceremonies of Roman worship; whereas the Jewish nation, whether under pagan or Christian monarchs, has never lost the sign of their law, by which they are distinguished from all other nations and peoples'; *C. Faust.* XII.13.

³⁸ *De fide rerum* 6.9.

³⁹ *C. Faust.* XII.12.

B. MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHIC DESIGNS

THE UTILIZATION OF ALLEGORY IN ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

Alfred L. Ivry

Islam as a new faith held many beliefs and institutions in common with its older monotheistic sisters, Judaism and Christianity. The Qur'ān reprised many Biblical tales, and embraced many of the older Scriptures' heroes, in addition to their God. The earlier Biblical material underwent a literary as well as religious adoption / adaptation. Substantive variations in the Qur'ān were often accompanied by stylistic peculiarities as well, affecting the dynamics of the text and its relation to the reader.

Where the Biblical narrative affects a sense of immediacy and drama, the Qur'ān recites, or often simply refers to, the same stories, in a deliberately didactic manner. In the Qur'ān, the Prophet Muhammad and we are reminded of events which transpired in the past and which are not only history, but hierohistory. Whereas the Biblical heroes are human and fallible, they are represented in the Qur'ān as staid models of wisdom, piety and trust in God. The Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets are significant in the Qur'ān purely for the moral lessons they teach us; they are cloaked in the mantle of prophecy and virtue. Conversely, all sinners are unmitigated villains, ungrateful and ignorant fools.

In this manner, the Qur'ān expresses a piety and apologetic approach to the Bible similar to the Jewish and Christian post-Biblical traditions.¹ The moral ambiguities which surround the Biblical tales of sibling rivalry and the relations between fathers and sons are absent in the Qur'ān; the clear and uncompromising command of Allah now directs human behavior, and comments upon it. Indeed,

¹ Midrashic as well as Biblical influence on the Qur'ān was noted in the past by Abraham Geiger, Charles Torrey, Gustav Weil and others. Cf., in this genre, the recent study of J. Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba* (Chicago, 1993), pp. 36-46, 120-124.

the role of the Qur'anic narrator as commentator on the Biblical story is striking. Allah is not the star player in a human drama, as is the Biblical God. He is above it all now as director and playwright, inserting His comments into the very center of the Script He has written for all people, but particularly for the Arabs.

This authorial presence dominates the figures who appear in the Qur'ān. Individual persons diminish in significance before Him, and serve primarily as examples from whom others may benefit. Abraham the person becomes Abraham the Ḥanīf, the monotheist,² his life serving as a paradigm of obedience to the One God.³

Even the literary gem of the Qur'ān, its 'most beautiful of stories,'⁴ that of Joseph, is not free of pious asides and admonitions, parenthetical remarks of a sort which distance the reader from the action described, however detailed and dramatic it is. Joseph is no longer the naive innocent of the Bible, Jacob not offended by his son's vision of his parents and older siblings bowing down to him.⁵ Nor is Jacob fooled by his other sons' description of Joseph's death, but counsels himself to patience and belief in Allah's assistance.⁶ In this way, the Qur'ān smooths out the unseemly actions and undeserving anguish of the righteous. The patriarchs are not given their fallibility and hence humanity, even in this most human and affecting of Qur'ānic tales.⁷

We are witness, thus, to a transformation of character, plot, and genre, in comparing the texts of the Bible and the Qur'ān. A didactic and moralizing tone characterizes the latter, narrative replaced largely by sermon and homily. Muslim commentators see this trans-

² Qur'ān, surahs II:135; III:67; XVI:120.

³ This is not to say that the Biblical Abraham is not already a composite figure of symbolic significance, rather than a 'truly' historic person. Yet the Bible manages to give us a sense of individuality in its personae; they have distinctive personalities, and do not function primarily as symbols. Cf., however, the Qur'ān's treatment of Biblical and midrashic stories involving Abraham, in, e.g., surahs VI:74-84; XXI:51-73; and XXXVII:83-113.

⁴ Arabic: *aḥsānā l-qīṣaṣ*. Cf. 'Sūrah Yūsuf,' XII:3. A recent appreciation of the literary and linguistic merit of this surah is found in A.H. Johns, 'The Quranic Presentation of the Joseph Story: Naturalistic or Formulaic Language?' in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. G.R. Hawting and A.-K.A. Shareef (London, 1993), pp. 37-70.

⁵ Surah XII:5, and compare Genesis XXXVII:10.

⁶ Surah XII:18, and compare Genesis XXXVII:33-35.

⁷ The contrasting portrayal of a very human, seductive Zulaykha, the tradition's name for the wife of Potiphar, and the other women of the city, is very marked. This is undoubtedly due to their inferior status in the story, and their place in the canon. Cf. surah XII:23-32.

formation of literary genres, as of the character of Biblical figures, as a distinctive sign of the Qur'ān's superior moral sensibility.⁸ Be that as it may, from a literary standpoint (which traditional Muslims discount immediately) the Qur'ān has effected a significant change in the Biblical legacy, treating individual persons and events as universal types and symbols.

This approach turns the Qur'ānic presentations of Biblical stories into allegories, the persons involved into emblems of virtue or vice. Their lives are treated as parables meant to instruct, intimidate and encourage the faithful.⁹ Allegory is thus intrinsic to the Qur'ān, understanding allegory in the sense of an interpretive technique whereby a term, person or event stands for something else in addition to itself, and is part of a similarly construed extended narrative. The stories involving Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses et al. can serve effectively as allegories since their original identity and history remains evident, however subsumed in the larger divine design.¹⁰

Alongside allegory, the Qur'ān abounds in metaphor and simile, allegory in one sense being an extended metaphor.¹¹ Allegory often incorporates these figures of speech, pointing, as does metaphor, to non-literal meanings which are beyond denotative language and beyond empirical recognition. As with simile, however, allegory may be content to establish clear and specific correspondences between the literal and non-literal dimensions of its subject, the 'non-literal' meaning no less understood than the literal.¹²

The message of the Qur'ān, using these literary devices, was both old and new, familiar and unfamiliar to its original auditors. The 'newness' is enhanced by the use of novel terms, unknown words which are given apocalyptic and eschatological associations, such as

⁸ Cf. the introduction to surah XII by A.Y. Ali in his edition and translation, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'ān* (London, 1975), p. 313. Of course, the allegedly unique character of the Qur'ān traditionally precludes literary evaluations of the sort attempted above.

⁹ Cf., e.g., surah XXIX:23–41. It is not coincidental that the 'parable' (*mathal*) of the spider follows references to Biblical persons there. All of God's creatures have symbolic significance in the Qur'ān.

¹⁰ This is more true of Old Testament figures than of New Testament ones, the Christian identity of Jesus being particularly compromised. See, e.g., surahs IV:157, V:75, and XIX:35, 88–93.

¹¹ Cf. the extensive study of metaphor found in T. Sabbagh, *La métaphore dans le Coran* (Paris, 1943).

¹² Cf. J. Whitman's entry, 'Allegory,' *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger, T.V.F. Brogan, et al. (Princeton, 1993), p. 32.

'The Night of Power,'¹³ 'the Clatterer' and 'Pit,'¹⁴ and 'the Crusher.'¹⁵ The seeming literalness with which these terms are explained in the Qur'ān is modified by the imaginative nature of their descriptions. The Qur'ān, in its own words, is a 'guarded tablet,'¹⁶ revealing and not revealing itself. It is like a good tree, firmly rooted in the earth, with its branches in the heavens.¹⁷ This tree image is said to be a *mathal*, one of the many struck by God Himself.¹⁸ *Mathal* appears eighty-eight times in the Qur'ān; it is often translated as 'similitude,' though frequently the term conveys a parable or aphorism.¹⁹ The *mathal* is clearly meant to represent something other than what it literally depicts; it is like it, but is not the thing itself.

A *mathal* is thus like and unlike, even as a similitude is not a verisimilitude. This is seen in the Qur'ān's own depiction of Allah, the Creator of the universe, as *al-mathal al-'ā'lā*, rendered by Arberry as 'the loftiest likeness,' and by Pickthall as 'the sublime similitude.'²⁰ In the Qur'ān, God alone is the 'coiner' (literally, 'striker') of similitudes / aphorisms / parables / allegories, *amthāl* given to all men but understood only by the wise, those who believe.²¹ These men know that besides statements which are 'decisive' or 'clear' (*muḥkamāt*), the Qur'ān has 'signs' / verses (*āyāt*) which are 'ambiguous,' *mutashābihāt*.²² The proper interpretation of the latter, as well presumably as the very distinction between the two, is known only to Allah. The famous

¹³ *Laylah al-qadr*, surah XCVII:1.

¹⁴ Surah CI:1; 'the Clatterer' translates *al-qār'ah*, following A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (London, 1955); it is rendered as 'calamity' by M.M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York, 1953), and by M.M. Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān* (Lahore, 1917), and as 'Noise and Clamour' by A.Y. Ali, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'ān* (Tehran, 1975). The 'Pit' is Arberry's and A.Y. Ali's choice for *hāwiyah* in surah CI:9; it is given as 'abyss' by M.M. Ali, and as 'The Bereft and Hungry One'(!) by Pickthall.

¹⁵ Surah CIV:4; 'the Crusher' is Arberry's translation of *al-ḥutamah*, given as the 'crushing disaster' by M.M. Ali, 'The Consuming One' by Pickthall, and 'That which Breaks to Pieces' by A.Y. Ali.

¹⁶ Surah LXXXV:22, *lawḥ mahfūz*.

¹⁷ Surah XIV:24.

¹⁸ Surah XIV:25.

¹⁹ Cf. surahs XXIX:41-43, XXXIX:27-29 and elsewhere. See, among other studies, H. Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran* (London, 1902), pp. 83-97; J. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 239-244.

²⁰ Surah XXX:27.

²¹ Cf. surah XXIX:43 and elsewhere.

²² Surah III:7, following Arberry; the other translators (note 14 above) render this term, whose root *sha-ba-ha* evokes likeness and comparison, as 'allegorical.'

'light verse' of surah XXIV:35 is presumably one such example, though that did not deter would-be interpreters from allegorizing it.²³

Determined to present the 'true' interpretation of its tales, the Qur'ān is yet aware of alternative interpretations, i.e., alternative views of reality. Muhammad inveighs against such false interpretations, those initiated by mere mortals.²⁴ God's 'truth,' accordingly, is contrasted with the 'similitudes' of human beings,²⁵ the human creation of *amthāl* recognized as a suspect enterprise.

The Qur'ān, accordingly, employs figurative language of all kinds, be it metaphor, simile, parable or allegory. This language must be understood for what it is to be understood properly, yet the Qur'ān is itself wary of (human) interpretation, *ta'wīl*. This negative attitude was often maintained in post-Qur'ānic times by those who saw themselves as guardians of the faith. *Ta'wīl* was contrasted with *tafsīr*: *ta'wīl* construed as the product of research and reason, *tafsīr* regarded as based on the transmission of authoritative reports; the former identified with allegorical interpretation, the latter with literal meaning.²⁶

The impetus to read diverse levels of meaning into God's word, following the Qur'ān's own example, was not, however, to be denied. Each segment of Islamic society after Muhammad's death interpreted the Qur'ān in support of its legitimacy. Those who first 'dissented' from the majority and came to be viewed as 'sectarian' movements, the Kharijites and Shi'ites, acted out of conviction in the rectitude of their scriptural interpretations. The grammarians, lawyers, mystics and theologians of Islam all used the Qur'ān for their purposes, interpreting it in accordance with their particular interests and views.

Among the commentators on the Qur'ān there emerged the view, familiar from faiths and cultures other than Islam, of several distinct yet complementary kinds of meaning to the text: the exoteric or literal sense (*ẓāhir*); the esoteric or allegorical sense (*bāṭin*); the prescriptive or moral sense (*ḥadd*); and the spiritual, mystical sense (*maṭla'*). This has been compared with the division of Biblical exegesis into the diverse interpretations of *historia*, *allegoria*, *tropologia* and *anagoge*.²⁷

²³ As, famously so, al-Ghazālī. Cf. al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt Al-Anwār* ('The Niche for Lights'), translated by W.H.T. Gairdner, Royal Society Monographs, Vol. XIX (London, 1924). [On Avicenna's interpretation of this verse, see chapter 2 (v). —ed.]

²⁴ Surah III:6.

²⁵ Surah XXV:33.

²⁶ Cf. Wansbrough, cited above in n. 19, pp. 154–158.

²⁷ Wansbrough, p. 243.

[On fourfold interpretation in medieval Christian thought, see chapters 1 (ii) and 11. —ed.] In different times and places, greater or lesser leeway was given to the non-literal dimensions of interpretation, variations which can be correlated with broader or narrower construals of the *shari'ah*, Islamic law. It is not coincidental that Shi'i commentators, as well as Sufi mystics, emphasized the non-literal dimensions of interpretation, giving *ta'wīl* its negative connotation among Sunni Muslims.

Whatever their inclination, Muslim commentators upon the Qur'ān believed they were following the text when reading it allegorically. They believed they were engaged in a hermeneutic dictated and controlled by the eternal, divine Book. In this, Muslim exegetes were following in the allegorical footsteps of their Jewish and Christian predecessors, if not as well in the steps of the Stoics. The guardians and transmitters of each of these cultures invested their classical texts with meaning they believed inherent in them, though not previously explicated.

Among the *falāsifa*, the philosophers of Islam, neither the exegetical activity of allegoresis nor the composition of allegories was particularly popular. There are, however, a few examples of both kinds of philosophical allegorizing, and they are worth considering for the light they shed upon their authors and the culture in which they wrote.

Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, 980–1037 C.E.), the most prolific of Muslim *falāsifa*, wrote in a variety of genres. He composed three allegories, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, *Salāmān and Absāl*, and *The Treatise of The Bird*. Together with other writings, some lost and others extant only in brief or fragmentary fashion, these allegories have been thought to express an aspect of Avicenna's thought different from that found in his philosophical compositions.²⁸

Avicenna's allegories in fact struck a deep chord within the Persian psyche. Together with the writings of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191), they nourished a theosophical literature, mostly in Persian, which has survived to this day.²⁹ This 'Eastern Wisdom' (*al-ḥikma al-*

²⁸ Cf. A.F. Mehren, *Traité mystiques d'Abou 'Alī Ḥosain b. 'Abdallah b. Sīnā ou d'Avicenne*, 4 fascicles (Leiden, 1889–1899), reprinted in one volume (Leiden, 1979); L. Gardet, *La pensée religieuse d'Avicenne (Ibn Sīnā)* (Paris, 1951), pp. 143–196.

²⁹ Cf. S.H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna—Suhrawardī—Ibn 'Arabi* (Cambridge, MA, 1964), pp. 43–47, 52–82; H. Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination: A Study of Suhrawardī's Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (Atlanta, 1990), pp. 20–39.

mashriqīya) is directed inward, external objects and events serving as stepping stones towards an internal gnosis.³⁰

It is questionable, however, whether Avicenna so construed his allegories. It is possible to regard them as imaginative narratives which serve to dramatize key metaphysical tenets which in his philosophical work he expressed in more prosaic, traditional terms. A recent study of the allegories has concluded that they should be seen as a mythic representation of the 'logos' or rational presentation of Avicenna's philosophy.³¹ [On imaginative presentations of philosophic arguments in medieval Christian writing, see chapters 2 (vii) and 10. —ed.]

Yet this philosophical interpretation of the allegories, for all its merit, frequently requires one to be satisfied only with broad thematic correspondences between the two genres of Avicenna's writing, since the elaborate story line of the allegories often makes specific philosophical reference otiose. This is due to the nature of creative allegory,³² which, as literature, defies merely denotative denomination. Still, as philosophy the allegories would appear to represent two main strands of Avicenna's thought, the metaphysical and the ethical, sometimes woven together, sometimes separated.

The allegory of *Salāmān and Absāl*, in the summary manner we have it, appears as a simple morality play.³³ There are the two half brothers of the title, their two unnamed wives, who are sisters, and

³⁰ Cf. H. Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, trans. W.R. Trask (New York, 1960), pp. 4–16. Avicenna's allegories, which Corbin translates here, are subjected in the introduction and notes of this study to a full-scale mystical interpretation along gnostic lines. See pp. 28–35 for Corbin's particular exegesis of *ta'wīl* and other terms. He rejects calling these recitations (*risālāt*, literally 'epistles' or 'treatises') allegories, believing that the genre depersonalizes and universalizes its object, the opposite effect of that which the gnostic seeks.

³¹ Cf. P. Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā)* (Philadelphia, 1992), pp. 8–10, 149–155. For a strong denial of the mystical reading of Avicenna as found in Corbin and others, cf. D. Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works* (Leiden, 1988), pp. 115–129, 299–318. See also Gutas' entry on Avicenna's alleged mysticism in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater, III (London, 1989), 79–83.

³² That is, an allegory which is created as such, as opposed to the allegoresis of an earlier, ostensibly non-allegorical text. Exegetes in the latter tradition at times seek to identify each part of the passages on which they concentrate. Cf. J. Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), p. 3.

³³ The story is preserved only second-hand, as summarized by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (thirteenth century), and see Corbin, pp. 205–207, 223–226. This shortened version renders any interpretation that much more conjectural.

assorted minor and undistinguished characters, both soldiers and palace functionaries. Salāmān, the elder sibling, is a regal but passive figure, ignorant of his wife's passion for his younger brother, Absāl. The latter is chaste as well as handsome and intelligent, and tries to stay out of his sister-in-law's clutches. With her sister's consent, Salāmān's wife tries to seduce Absāl on his wedding night, but is foiled when a lightning bolt reveals her identity.

Absāl flees temptation by going off to war, conquering all the countries on earth, both East and West, in his brother's name. Returning home, he finds his sister-in-law's passion unabated. Denied again, her love turns to anger, and she attempts to have Absāl killed on the battlefield. Abandoned by his soldiers, he is wounded and left for dead. An animal succors him, however, and restores him to health. He returns to rescue his besieged brother and restore him to the throne, only to fall victim finally to his nemesis the Queen, who arranges to poison him. Salāmān, ignorant of his wife's machinations, renounces his throne in grief, and goes into seclusion, holding 'secret conversation' there with God. The truth is thereby revealed to him, whereupon he avenges his brother's death by poisoning in turn his wife and those who did her bidding.

The tale ends abruptly on this grim note of vengeance. The story has no obvious moral and apparently no happy ending, on the literal level. Absāl, for all his supposed intelligence, is no match for his sister-in-law's tenacity and wiliness. Salāmān is also an inept figure, being left with nothing and no one by the story's end. The second sister, Absāl's intended bride, is a shadowy figure, as are the conspirators in the poisoning. There is thus little material on which to hang elaborate allegories of the sort traditionally offered.³⁴

Staying nevertheless within the traditional interpretation of this tale as an allegory,³⁵ and viewing it largely on its own, we might

³⁴ Cf. Corbin, pp. 226 ff. Corbin is aided in his interpretation of this allegory by assimilating it to others in this genre, and to Avicenna's mystically inclined writings, namely, his *Ode on the Soul* and the ninth book of his *Admonitions and Remarks*. In this view, the tale is an allegory of the soul's spiritual journey, with Absāl representing the theoretical intellect, his death an ascent to the universal Active Intellect.

³⁵ Recently, S. Stroumsa has attempted to read these tales as Avicenna's attempt at writing dramatic stories, following the dictates of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Stroumsa's approach emphasizes the role of the plot in these stories, and brings out nicely the imaginative dimension in them which Avicenna would have favored for philosophical as well as aesthetic reasons. This approach need not preclude reading these tales as allegories, however. Cf. S. Stroumsa, 'Avicenna's Philosophical Stories: Aristotle's *Poetics* Reinterpreted,' *Arabica* 39 (1992), 183–206.

legitimately view the story of *Salāmān and Absāl* as having essentially an ethical meaning. The main actors in this morality play personify various faculties of the soul, which need to be integrated in order to function successfully. *Salāmān*'s wife represents the concupiscent forces in the soul, clear threats to both personal and societal well-being. The two half brothers stand for the two other aspects of soul on the Platonic model, viz., the spirited or 'irascible' and the intellectual; or the two aspects of intellect, on the Aristotelian model, viz., the practical and theoretical intellects.³⁶

Absāl, as the man of action and valor, is to be identified either with the practical intellect or with the spirited soul, that which functions with righteous indignation.³⁷ Without the guidance of the intellect (Plato), or, more specifically, the theoretical intellect (Aristotle), he is doomed. On the other hand, *Salāmān*, qua pure or theoretical intellect, is by himself helpless in the affairs of this world, unable to relate to the complex passions and conflicts of life. He is saved and safe only in retreat from this world, consecrating himself to God, i.e., thinking about the truth. He is roused from this theoretical activity only by avenging his brother's death, and is apparently unable or unprepared, afterwards, to resume the throne. Presumably he is to remain in seclusion forever after.

From the gnostic and mystical viewpoint, this conclusion is most apt, pointing to the desired death of all physical passions and worldly desires, and the relinquishing of all political power. Notwithstanding his essentially passive nature, *Salāmān* emerges in this reading as the hero of the story, triumphing over both his wife and his own alter ego / half brother.³⁸ This reading, however, turns the story inside out, viewing defeat as victory, and *Absāl*, the heroic central character of the story, as really an anti-hero. For this reason, the gnostic / mystical interpretation of this allegory is questionable, and the simpler, ethicist reading is preferable. At least in the extant state of the story, the moralistic message, without elaborate metaphysical dimensions, is all we can safely deduce from the tale.

The allegories of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* and *The Bird* afford us more justification for metaphysical flights. They literally deal with flights

³⁶ Cf. *Republic* IV, 14, 15; *De anima*, III:4, 5.

³⁷ *Pace* Ṭūsī and Corbin, p. 227, and see note 34 above.

³⁸ It is probably the nebulous character of *Salāmān*, in contrast to the dynamic nature of *Absāl*, which has Corbin and others preferring to see the latter as the hero of the story.

and travels to distant (imaginative) lands, indeed, to the very ends of the earth. Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān, as his name denotes,³⁹ is an old yet young sage, all-knowing yet forever journeying and questing. The narrator of the story seeks guidance from him, and is first warned to beware of three companions. The one, 'who walks ever before thee,' is the voice of supposed authority, reporting traditions and beliefs for which a person has no first-hand experience. Such reports, however necessary their presence, can be false and misleading. The other two companions, who accompany a person on either side through life, are identified as violent emotions and vulgar desires, both capable of destroying one.

Ḥayy counsels tempering the one set of irrational feelings with the other, and advises discriminating between false and true reports. In particular, the sort of reports prophets bring from God should be taken seriously. Still, to emulate Ḥayy, as the narrator wishes, he must forsake his companions entirely. Though the time for that (the period after one's death) has not come, yet he may lose them temporarily, for limited periods, making partial headway while alive in his journey towards the truth.

This first part of the tale bears comparison with that of Salāmān and Absāl. It serves as a prologue to the main body of the allegory, which is that of a cosmic journey, divided into separate Eastern and Western segments. The journey begins with the initiate bathing and drinking in special springs, fortifying himself (and transforming himself) for the trials and wonders which lie ahead.⁴⁰ The Occident is first described, beginning with an area of perpetual darkness and deformation. Some nine regions of diverse natures are described between that furthest point and our own. Some regions have beautiful, good and cultured people, others cruel and deceiving types. There is finally a kingdom of hermits, and above them an angelic kingdom from which emanates the Divine Command and Destiny, *al-amr al-ilāhī* and *al-qadar al-ilāhī*.

The East is then described, its initial region replicating an evolutionary scheme, up to but not including human beings. Angels and demons proliferate on this side of the cosmos, warring with each other and with human beings. Sometimes these demons come in search of humans, to waylay them, encourage evil actions and false

³⁹ 'Vivens filius Vigilantis,' in Corbin's translation, p. 137.

⁴⁰ Cf. Corbin, pp. 141, 142.

beliefs. Among the latter are disbelief in the spiritual realm and its sovereign, in an afterlife, and in reward and punishment.⁴¹

As opposed to these 'terrestrial angels' there are 'spiritual angels' who guide people in the right path, two guardian angels for each person. This angelic realm abuts the final realm, that beyond the celestial spheres. There people live extraordinarily long lives of virtue and purity, some employed in maintaining the cities of the region, others, the most fortunate, simply basking in the vision of the king. This latter group experiences a continuous and silent epiphany, as the king does not speak. A 'father' of miraculous youth and vigor gives voice to the words and orders of the king. The king himself is beyond all description and understanding, His beauty beyond compare, His generosity overflowing. 'It would seem that His beauty is the veil of His beauty, that His Manifestation is the cause of His Occultation, that His Epiphany is the cause of His Hiddenness.'⁴²

The story of Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān concludes with this Neoplatonic vision, many details of which defy specific correlation. The journey to the West concludes in an unmistakably angelic realm, the source of that 'part' of the divine which determines all things, including human destiny. The East is almost entirely the sphere of angelic (and demonic) forces, through which the seeker of truth must wend his way to reach the king.

In this final realm Avicenna introduces what appears to be a distinctly Shi'ī touch, the 'father' who serves to articulate the king's words and order, this figure being reminiscent of the Isma'ili *waṣī* who serves the *nāṭiq* / prophet in a similar manner.⁴³ However, it is the vision of God / the King, and not His spoken message, which is the ultimate experience described, a vision which is overwhelming, even if imperfectly grasped: 'He is mild and merciful. His generosity overflows. His goodness is immense. His gifts overwhelm; vast is His court, universal His favor. Whoever perceives a trace of His beauty fixes his contemplation upon it forever; never again, even for the twinkling of an eye, does he let himself be distracted from it.'⁴⁴

⁴¹ These are the same false beliefs the seeker for truth was warned to detect when told to be suspicious of what he hears. Cf. also below, p. 172.

⁴² Corbin, p. 150.

⁴³ This basic tenet of Isma'ili theology may have affected Maimonides' thought, too. Cf. A.L. Ivry, 'Isma'ili Theology and Maimonides' Philosophy,' *The Jews of Medieval Islam*, ed. D. Frank (Leiden, 1995), pp. 296-299.

⁴⁴ Corbin, p. 150.

The East, then, contains the ultimate beatific vision which one may hope to experience, already in this life; once experienced, it is never to be relinquished. In this manner, Avicenna holds out a vision of happiness and fulfillment within human grasp, i.e., attainable for a person who has mastered all the sciences, has conquered his physical drives and desire for material and political success, and is dedicated to contemplation of the heavens, i.e., to metaphysics. The Western route also leads to God, but to recognition of His omniscience and omnipotence, not to His beauty and grace. The seeker of truth has apparently to travel in both directions in order to encompass all of being, and to grasp, however inadequately, the essence of Divinity.

The Bird allegory has many similarities to the tale of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, but also many differences. The tone of *The Bird* is more personal, even poignant. It is written more in the first person, and conveys more emotion than Avicenna reveals in his other allegories. It is also more clearly structured, the most literary of the allegories as we have them.

A prologue bemoans the absence of sincere friendship, a theme reinforced in a mock-humorous vein in an epilogue. There Avicenna writes that his acquaintances will not understand his allegory, taking it literally. They will believe he is suffering a mental breakdown, and prescribe various cures. Avicenna thus gives way to his fear, or to his conviction, that his teachings will not be appreciated. Yet he has still written and published this piece, and he has deliberately left it unexplicated, as befits an allegory.

The prologue sets the tone for ambiguity with a series of cryptic admonitions, in praise of a truth which emerges best through paradoxical formulations: 'Love death, that you may still live. Be ever in flight; choose no settled nest, for it is in the nest that all birds are captured.'⁴⁵

This last statement is most apt for the allegory itself, a tale of a captured bird who, escaping with others, fears alighting at any of the mountains over which they fly. There are again nine mountain ranges in all, representing, it would seem, the entire planetary system. Each mountain summit has its attractions and dangers. When the birds do finally rest, in exhaustion, they are sorely tempted to remain

⁴⁵ Corbin, p. 187.

in what seem to be idyllic surroundings. Resisting this temptation, the birds find themselves in their next stop at an even more wonderful place. The birds who live there tell them of the supreme king, champion of the oppressed, who resides in a city beyond the mountain.

The fleeing birds arrive at the king's palace, and pass through its various courts, at last meeting the king himself. His beauty dazzles them at first, and deprives them of speech. He draws out their story, which includes a plea to free them of the cords which still cling to their feet. The king replies that only those who tied the cords can untie them, but that he will send a messenger along with them to command it. The allegory then ends with the statement that the birds are now en route, journeying in company with the king's messenger.

The moral of this tale is deceptively simple. We are all caught in the snares of this world, viz., its physical and material pleasures, if not life itself. We cannot fully escape our physical bonds, being mortal, though we may have a vision of the celestial world and its divine sovereign. God's messenger (The Prophet, presumably) can best lead us to that vision and that reality, though it be a lifetime journey.

This allegory approaches the human condition in essentially social terms. The author is constantly addressing others and, as a bird, is in the company of others. The bird is caught with other birds, and is freed through their assistance, appealing to them 'in the name of the eternal brotherhood.'⁴⁶ The king does speak in this allegory, unlike the king of Ḥayy's story, but as in that allegory the king's wishes are delegated to another, who carries them out.

It emerges from this story that Avicenna is of two minds as regards his own contemporaries, those with whom he is journeying through life. On the one hand, he is eager to reach out to them, realizing their common destiny; on the other hand, he fears they will mock him, not understanding him. He believes that the ultimate moment of truth cannot be adequately described, and thus cannot really be known. There is a mystical coloration to these two last allegories, though no clear theosophical identification. The dynamic is Neoplatonic, though the structures of that philosophy are missing. *The Bird* allegory has the most artful plot of all, but remains ambiguous as to its ulterior meanings in any but the most general of terms. The appropriation of these allegories for a specific theosophy is not necessarily

⁴⁶ Corbin, p. 189.

more correct than is their identification with a particular philosophy. Reading either approach into these tales is often an arbitrary act.

The ambivalence toward his contemporaries which the allegory of *The Bird* exhibits is apparent also in the great allegory of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* which the Andalusian courtier, physician and philosopher Abū Bakr Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185) composed.⁴⁷ As the title indicates, and as Ibn Ṭufayl himself acknowledges,⁴⁸ he is indebted to Avicenna for the name of the main figure of his story, as well as for his incorporation into his tale of Salāmān and Absāl. In the prologue to his story, Ibn Ṭufayl further claims that he will reveal the secrets of Avicenna's 'Oriental Philosophy'.⁴⁹

The allegory which Ibn Ṭufayl tells has certain affinities with those of Avicenna, but whether it fully represents the latter's teachings and whether Avicenna actually had a distinctive 'Oriental Philosophy' is another matter.⁵⁰ The 'Oriental Philosophy' which Ibn Ṭufayl espouses turns out to be a philosophically weighted mysticism. He finds some support in quoting Avicenna's closing remarks in his *Kūtāb al-Ishārāt wa l-Tanbihāt*.⁵¹ There Avicenna describes the pious 'devotee' (Arabic: *ʿārif*, literally a 'knower') as a person who follows his rational training with cultivation of an intuitive insight. He thereby develops his ability to comprehend matters immediately, without going through the normal ratiocative procedures. A rare individual, Ibn Ṭufayl comments, can dispense with rational speculation entirely, and function solely by intuition.⁵² Everyone else must use his (or her) intellect and pursue the sciences rationally, before going beyond them.

⁴⁷ Cf. the biography and study of Ibn Ṭufayl found in L. Gauthier's edition and French translation, *Ḥayy Ben Yaqdhan: roman philosophique d'Ibn Ṭufayl*, 2nd ed. (Beyrouth, 1936), pp. III–XII; see also L.E. Goodman's study and translation, *Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* (New York, 1972), pp. 3–6.

⁴⁸ Gauthier, p. 17; Goodman, p. 103.

⁴⁹ Or 'Eastern Wisdom,' *Al-ḥikma al-mashriqīya*; Goodman, pp. 95, 100, and Gauthier, pp. 1, 13 ('la philosophie illuminative').

⁵⁰ Cf. note 31 above. For a convincing argument that Ibn Ṭufayl had little familiarity with such an alleged position, see also D. Gutas, 'Ibn Ṭufayl on Ibn Sīnā's Eastern Philosophy,' *Oriens* 34 (1994), 222–241.

⁵¹ Ed. S. Dunya (Cairo, 1968), 4:86; French translation of A.-M. Goichon, *Livre des directives et remarques* (Beyrouth and Paris, 1951), p. 493.

⁵² Avicenna had included this phenomenon within his concept of intuition, *ḥads*, inter alia justifying the claim to philosophical perfection of the prophets. Cf. now Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, pp. 160–176; see also Gutas' analysis of Ibn Ṭufayl's adaptation and mystification of this faculty, 'Ibn Ṭufayl on Ibn Sīnā's Eastern Philosophy,' 235–239.

Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory exemplifies this teaching. It is the story of a person who grows up alone from infancy on a deserted island and uses his native intelligence to master his environment and eventually learn all the sciences. In a charmingly inventive way, Ibn Ṭufayl describes how Ḥayy, apropos of investigating the death of the doe that succored and reared him, is led to think in terms of the species of deer, then of other species, and finally of species *per se*. Soon he is on to realizing the fundamental conceptual principles of science: primary and secondary substance, form and matter, prime matter and the elements, and causal efficacy. Working with these principles, and using his innate skills of induction and deduction, combined with experiment and observation, Ḥayy proceeds from the natural sciences to astronomy and metaphysics.

At an early stage of his deductions, Ḥayy is struck by a sense of the unity of being, a unity more significant than all apparent multiplicity and diversity. Relatedly, he is quickly drawn to look for explanations of a non-physical and immaterial sort, to seek out the formal and final causes of things, to look to the soul of living beings. The world as a whole is seen as a living organism, its first cause perceived as a beneficent Creator.

This creative role is assigned the first cause, whether the world is deemed created or eternal. Ḥayy / Ibn Ṭufayl is unable to resolve this question, offering critiques of both positions.⁵³ In either case, a first cause, responsible at least for the forms of the world, has to be posited. As Ḥayy considers the world to be wonderfully designed, its Creator is assumed to be good and merciful.⁵⁴

At this point, at the age of thirty-five, Ḥayy is totally drawn to the idea and being of God, and to the attempt to resemble Him ever more closely. God is described both in Avicennian terms, as the Necessary Existent, and in mystical terms: "There is no existence but Him. He is being, perfection, and wholeness. He is goodness, beauty, power, and knowledge. He is He. "All things perish except His face." "⁵⁵

⁵³ Muslim *falāsifa*, excepting al-Kindi, believed in an eternal universe on the Aristotelian model, however more personal their God appeared to be than Aristotle's. Maimonides is similar to Ibn Ṭufayl in critiquing both the eternity and the *creatio ex nihilo* hypotheses. Cf. his *Guide of the Perplexed*, II:13-24.

⁵⁴ Ibn Ṭufayl does not at all consider the problem of evil in the world, and thus has no theodicy.

⁵⁵ Goodman, p. 134, and cf. Qur'ān, surah XXVIII:88.

Ḥayy adopts extreme ascetic mannerisms, and yearns for the annihilation of his self in union with God. When Ḥayy finally arrives at that point, however, Ibn Ṭufayl interrupts his narrative to lecture the reader on the difficulty of describing the mystical experience. It appears Ibn Ṭufayl wishes to present the mystic's belief in the radical unity of being, i.e., pantheism. 'His true self was the Truth. What he had once supposed to be himself, as distinct from the Truth, was really nothing in itself, but was in reality in no way discrete from the Truth.'⁵⁶ As this sort of identification with God is anathema to orthodox Islam, it is not surprising that Ibn Ṭufayl immediately qualifies his remarks, claiming that talk of unity, as of plurality, is inappropriate for immaterial being.

He attempts another description, this time of a theosophical sort, offering visions of immaterial beings joined to the various spheres, each paradoxically said to be identical and not identical with The Truth and The One. The visions grow increasingly complex, with a proliferation of spiritual forms, both beautiful and ugly, each experiencing either a blessed or a tortured existence, presumably in the afterlife. Again, Ibn Ṭufayl interrupts his story to lecture the reader on the dangers of literalism, his essential point being the superior existence of the spiritual world and its divine Creator. The story then takes a new turn, though the moral is the same: to avoid literalism, to probe beyond the external and surface dimension of experience and of accounts of experience. [On attitudes toward the displacement of reference points in the near-contemporary work of Maimonides, see chapters 2 (vi) and 8. —ed.]

This moral is brought home with the resumption of the dramatic narrative. Absāl arrives on Ḥayy's island, a refugee from the civilization of a nearby island, seeking to find God in solitude. Instead he finds Ḥayy, and teaches him human speech. Ḥayy in turn teaches Absāl the truths he has learned, and insists that Absāl take him back to his country, ruled by Salāmān, in order to spread the word of truth there.

The truth is that Absāl's religion, like all religions, is composed of symbols of the truth, and that some of the symbols are actually misleading, e.g., the corporeal representation of the incorporeal God.⁵⁷ Ḥayy is also upset that Absāl's religion, the essential teachings of

⁵⁶ Gauthier, p. 88; Goodman, p. 150.

⁵⁷ Gauthier, p. 108; Goodman, p. 161.

which he endorses, does not insist on ascetic practices, but rather indulges, and even institutionalizes through law, material concerns.

Ḥayy's attempt to enlighten the citizens of Absāl's island fails, and he concludes that most people want to and are able to understand God only in anthropomorphic terms, being indifferent to and ignorant of His true nature. At the same time, Ḥayy realizes that organized religion serves a valuable socio-political function, safeguarding life and property. Though it might not save their souls, the popular religion is necessary, he concludes. 'Ḥayy now understood the human condition. He saw that most men are no better than unreasoning animals, and realized that all wisdom and guidance, all that could possibly help them was contained already in the words of the prophets and the religious traditions. None of this could be different. There was nothing to be added.'⁵⁸

With this in mind, Ḥayy's parting advice to the public is to maintain their religion as they have received it. He knows that trying to have people understand it on the esoteric level he has reached will just confuse them. He concludes, rather inconsistently, that they can even win salvation through their conventional forms of belief. Absāl and he, on the other hand, return to the solitude of his island, there to have a genuine and immediate relation with God.

Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory thus ends on what appears to be an unambiguously political note. He presents organized religion as a construct of symbolic representations of the truth, taken literally by the masses.⁵⁹ They must not be disabused of their understanding of the faith, for religion serves a useful and necessary social and political purpose. The true man of faith, however, has little in common with the popular conceptions of the masses, and does not identify with their institutions, construed all too literally and materially.

The 'true man of faith' for Ibn Ṭufayl, it seems clear, is the mystic. Yet Ibn Ṭufayl's brand of mysticism remains unclear. It would appear to be pantheistic, but veers off into theosophical constructions. He apparently felt he was thereby following Avicenna's lead, though he may well have been taking Avicenna's allegories in too mystical a direction.

Ibn Ṭufayl, then, like Avicenna, is disdainful of the fundamentalistic manner in which Islam is normally presented. Contemptuous

⁵⁸ Gauthier, p. 111; Goodman, p. 164.

⁵⁹ This view, harking back to Plato, was strongly endorsed by the Muslim *falāsifa*.

as he is of the literal understanding of their faith which the overwhelming majority of Muslims hold, Ibn Ṭufayl, like his supposed mentor, yet reaches out to the few who agree to go beyond the surface appearance of text and empirical reality. He wants the rare individual of this sort to be a philosopher first, i.e., to be one who knows all the sciences, but to be prepared to go beyond science and philosophy as normally construed.

Ibn Ṭufayl has no quarrel with the corpus of scientific data; he simply regards it as insufficient and inadequate to express ultimate truths about God and being (which are to him ultimately identical). He is upset with certain statements of Alfarabi (d. 950) which deny immortality and consider prophecy a product of the imaginative faculty.⁶⁰ Ibn Ṭufayl may know of fellow Andalusians in his own day influenced by secular philosophies of this sort, for in both the prologue and the epilogue to his allegory he inveighs against 'self-appointed' and 'self-styled' philosophers who are causing 'universal damage,'⁶¹ hurtful presumably to the community of believers.

The allegorical tale he has composed is a response to these so-called philosophers, Ibn Ṭufayl declares, and to the danger they pose to the 'weak-minded' who may accept their authority over that of 'the prophets,' i.e., over traditional religious authority. He concedes that he has gone further than his predecessors in revealing esoteric truths, justifying his action by the very real threat posed by the false and corrupting ideas in circulation.

Ibn Ṭufayl clearly feels the particular blend of philosophy and mysticism which he advocates has not been adequately expressed before. He believes, correctly, that both Avicenna and al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), his main and revered sources of mystical inspiration, have offered conflicting messages in their various writings. Ibn Bājjah (d. 1138), in turn, his esteemed Andalusian philosophical predecessor, is criticized for believing that the philosophical approach is sufficient in itself, regarding the mystic's further claims to be imaginative delusions.⁶²

⁶⁰ Cf. Gauthier, p. 12, and see Goodman, p. 100, and notes there.

⁶¹ Gauthier, pp. 16, 23; Goodman, pp. 102, 165.

⁶² Gauthier, pp. 4-6; Goodman, pp. 96-102. The philosophical orientation of Ibn Bājjah's *The Governance of the Solitary*, *Tadbīr al-Mutawahhīd*, may well have served as a model for Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory. Cf. selections of this work translated by L. Berman, *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. R. Lerner and M. Mahdi (New York, 1963), pp. 122-133.

Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory of Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān thus serves a polemical purpose, the author attempting to influence the intellectual public of his day, beginning no doubt with the caliph and his court. This polemical motif is present in much greater strength in the work of Ibn Ṭufayl's younger contemporary, Abū l-Walīd ibn Rushd, a.k.a. Averroes (1126–1198). Introduced by Ibn Ṭufayl to the Almohad caliph Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf some time in 1168 or 1169, Averroes received a royal commission to write commentaries on Aristotle's work. The description we have of the interview Averroes had with the caliph shows that the Prince of the Believers was interested in philosophy and science, and that Averroes was surprised to find that out. This in itself is not surprising, for the Almohad regime was considered to be puritanical and highly conservative.⁶³ Clearly the caliph and his court were more cosmopolitan than the public image they presented.

Averroes accordingly was able to pursue his philosophical commentaries under favorable circumstances. Royal patronage probably encouraged him to go beyond the terms of his original commission, which was to write discrete, moderate-sized or 'middle' commentaries of a sort accessible and acceptable to his patron. Averroes wound up writing some thirty-eight commentaries of varying size and complexity,⁶⁴ including five 'long' commentaries which the Prince of the Believers could hardly have been expected to read, and which may well have tried his patience and sympathy for Averroes had he done so. For it is in his Long Commentaries in particular, as in his independent philosophical treatises, that Averroes emerges as a staunch and (mostly) uncompromising partisan of Aristotelian philosophy. [On versions of Aristotle in medieval philosophic allegory, see chapters 2 (v–vi, viii), 8, 9, and 11. —ed.]

This explicit allegiance to Aristotle was asserted in full awareness of the public perception of Aristotelian thought as being opposed to many of the fundamental tenets of Islam. Averroes makes two major attempts to refute this perception, focusing on the expression it received in the work of the great theologian and sometime mystic

⁶³ Cf. G. Hourani, *Averroes: On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London, 1961), pp. 9–14, and see below, note 69.

⁶⁴ Cf. H.A. Wolfson, 'Plan for the Publication of a Corpus Commentariorum Averrois in Aristotelem,' orig. pub. 1961, rpt. in Wolfson's *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, ed. I. Twersky and G.H. Williams, I (Cambridge, MA, 1973), 433–440.

al-Ghazālī.⁶⁵ The one attempt takes the form of a commentary on al-Ghazālī's critique of philosophy, his *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*.⁶⁶ Averroes' commentary, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, is critical both of al-Ghazālī's critique and of the Avicennian thought which al-Ghazālī presents as paradigmatic of philosophy.⁶⁷

Al-Ghazālī and Averroes cross swords in this work both over fundamental metaphysical tenets such as the eternity of the world and the functioning of the spheres, and over basic philosophical principles such as the validity of causal theory. At stake is the nature of nature itself, and whether it functions *per se*, of necessity, or *per accidens*, by the will of God.⁶⁸

The specific theological issues which philosophy was widely perceived as denying include those mentioned by Ibn Ṭufayl, viz., creation, God's knowledge of particulars, and physical resurrection. Averroes' attempts in the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* to explain these tenets of the faith philosophically show that his interpretation is far from traditional.

The same theological dogmas surface in Averroes' other main response to al-Ghazālī, his *Faṣl al-Maqāl*, popularly known as *The Decisive Treatise*.⁶⁹ Here, though, these issues are found in a different

⁶⁵ Among other things, these attacks on al-Ghazālī serve notice that Averroes is not Ibn Ṭufayl's disciple. Their points of view, as will emerge, are quite distinct, as Ibn Ṭufayl would have learned to his chagrin.

⁶⁶ Editions by M. Bouyges (Beirut, 1927) and S. Dunya (Cairo, 1955); translations by S.A. Kamali (Lahore, 1958) and M. Marmura (Provo, Utah), 1997.

⁶⁷ Editions by M. Bouyges (Beirut, 1930) and S. Dunya (Cairo, 1955); translation by S. Van den Bergh (London, 1954).

⁶⁸ Cf. A.L. Ivry, 'Averroes on Causation,' *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History*, ed. S. Stein and R. Loewe (University, Alabama, 1979), pp. 143–156.

⁶⁹ The full title of this treatise is *Kitāb Faṣl al-Maqāl wa Taqrīr mā Bayn al-Sharī'ah wal-Hikmah min al-Ittiṣāl*; rendered by G. Hourani in the valuable introduction to his translation as 'The book of the decision (or distinction) of the discourse, and a determination of what there is of connection between religion and philosophy.' Cf. his *Averroes: On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, p. 1, and see pp. 53–61 for Averroes' discussion of these theological issues. Hourani has also prepared a critical edition of this work, *Ibn Rushd (Averroes): Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl* (Leiden, 1959). The *Decisive Treatise* is part of a trilogy, first edited and then translated into German by M.J. Müller, *Philosophie und Theologie von Averroes* (Munich, 1859 and 1875, respectively). Hourani has reedited and translated two-thirds of this trilogy (*The Decisive Treatise* and the 'Appendix' or *Damāma*), and added a few pages of the third and longest work, 'Exposition of the Methods of the Proofs [Employed] in the Dogmas of Religion [etc.],' known commonly as *Manāhij*. Ch. Butterworth has announced a new translation in his recent study, 'The Source That Nourishes, Averroes's Decisive Determination,' *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 5:1 (1995), 93–119.

context, one which is not particularly philosophical. Rather, the *Decisive Treatise* is a legal composition, a defense of the legitimacy of philosophy within Islam.⁷⁰ It is an attempt to argue, on the basis of widely accepted norms of Islamic law, for the 'harmony of religion and philosophy.' Averroes' approach here is to agree with al-Ghazālī on principle, and to disagree with him on the application of these principles. Averroes particularly wishes to show that the charge of unbelief, *kufṛ*, which al-Ghazālī leveled against the philosophers in the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* and elsewhere, is not warranted, and that the philosophers have as much right as any other group of Muslims to hold the views they do—indeed, they have more right.

It is correct to privilege philosophy, according to Averroes, since the Qur'ān enjoins 'reflection' on and perusal of God's creation, activities which for Averroes are best pursued by philosophers. It is they who understand the different kinds of argument, being trained to distinguish between demonstrative, dialectical, rhetorical and sophistical reasoning. As philosophers, they may be relied upon to reason in the most conclusive way possible, using demonstrative arguments which lead to certain truth.⁷¹

Knowledge of the different forms of argument is but part of a broader knowledge, that of logic, which itself is merely the instrument for philosophical investigations. It is thus philosophy and science in general which the Qur'ān requires of the faithful, according to Averroes. The fact that the first generations of believers were unaware of this does not phase him, since he affirms that the articulation of the religious-legal system which presumes to judge the legitimacy of philosophy is itself post-Qur'ānic, essentially. The Qur'ān, for its part, speaks to those of varying skills and levels of sophistication,

⁷⁰ In addition to Hourani's work, cf. the analysis of the structure of this composition, and its political sub-text, in M. Mahdi, 'Remarks on Averroes' *Decisive Treatise*,' *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, ed. M. Marmura (Albany, 1984), pp. 188–202. See also Mahdi's analysis of the 'Appendix' in 'Averroes on Divine Law and Human Wisdom,' *Ancients and Moderns*, ed. J. Cropsey (New York, 1964), pp. 114–131. Cf. also the recent broad study of al-Ghazālī's and Averroes' use of *ijmā'* and *ta'wīl*, and the theological positions of each thinker, in I.A. Bello, *The Medieval Islamic Controversy between Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (Leiden, 1989).

⁷¹ Cf. Hourani, pp. 45 f. The command to 'reflect' (*i'tabirū*, literally 'consider') is found in Qur'ān LIX:2. See W.Z. Harvey, 'Averroes and Maimonides [o]n the Obligation of Philosophic Contemplation (I[']tibār),' *Tarbiḥ* 58:1 (1988), 77–78 [Hebrew].

using (and thereby legitimating) dialectical and rhetorical as well as, presumably, demonstrative arguments to lead people to the truth.

Accordingly, for Averroes Islamic law, the *shari'ah*, has no prior absolute claim to legitimacy over that of philosophy in its interpretation of the faith. He nevertheless is prepared, ostensibly, to use legal constructs as the standard by which to judge philosophy. In effect, however, as the above discussion shows, it is philosophical criteria which control his discourse.

Averroes is helped in claiming superiority for demonstrative argument by the fact that in a number of his writings al-Ghazālī appears to have accepted that position. He did so as part of his own philosophical inclinations and as a way of arguing with his own more dogmatic critics. In this, Averroes is fortunate in having al-Ghazālī as his opponent, for al-Ghazālī does not reject empirical data and definitions of natural objects, nor does he subscribe to the fiercely anti-naturalistic Occasionalism of other Muslim theologians.⁷² Equally important, al-Ghazālī accepts the legitimacy, even necessity at times, of non-literal and allegorical interpretation of the Qur'ān.

It is, however, just this agreement in principle with Averroes on the use of allegory and reason which makes al-Ghazālī so formidable an opponent. Averroes was not struggling to save philosophy from the fundamentalists and literalists who were still well represented in legal and theological circles, but who apparently were not favored by the court and thus not perceived as a present danger; rather, he was fighting against the insidious undermining of science and philosophy by a seemingly rational and moderate theology. The influence al-Ghazālī had exerted in the century since his death is attested indirectly by the fact that Averroes does not use al-Ghazālī's mystical treatises to impugn his philosophical credibility. Instead, Averroes argues from within al-Ghazālī's more seemingly philosophical pronouncements.

The book of al-Ghazālī's to which Averroes appeals in the *Decisive Treatise* is *Fayṣal al-Tafrīqah bayn al-Islam wa l-Ẓandaqah*, rendered in

⁷² Cf. now R.M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School* (Durham, N.C., and London, 1994), pp. 15–22, 87–91. Relying mostly on al-Ghazālī's theological writings, Frank believes that al-Ghazālī was committed to philosophical principles basically, appearances to the contrary being rhetorical and apologetic in nature. Other studies, by L. Goodman, I. Alon and B. Abrahamov, concerning al-Ghazālī's view of causation, emphasize his de facto acceptance of a natural world view, while noting his frequent theological caveats to the contrary. Cf., e.g., B. Abrahamov, 'Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Causality,' *Studia Islamica* 67/68 (1988), 75–98.

English by its translator as 'The Clear Criterion for Distinguishing Between Islam and Godlessness.'⁷³ The purpose of the book is to establish clear limitations on the use within the Islamic community of the charge of unbelief, *kufṛ*. Al-Ghazālī believes this most extreme of religious accusations, entailing death to the unbeliever if substantiated, has been used irresponsibly, there often being more agreement on religious tenets among the various factions in the community than is realized.

This covert agreement on seeming differences, al-Ghazālī argues, is due to the various ways in which a proposition can be expressed.⁷⁴ Besides referring to 'essential' or real existence, *al-wujūd al-dhātī*, predication can be of the object in its sensible, imagined, intelligible and metaphorical representations. Denial of a given proposition in one signification does not preclude acceptance of it in another, he affirms, and it is only denial in every meaningful sense that should be considered as true unbelief.

This acceptance of metaphorical predication of course sanctions allegorical interpretation, which al-Ghazālī accepts when necessary, i.e., when the literal meaning of a term or proposition is totally unacceptable, contradicting other propositions known to be true. This can lead to question begging and an infinite regress of arguments, and it is probably for this reason that al-Ghazālī boldly asserts the need to impose *burhān*, demonstrative argument, as the ultimate proof of the validity of a proposition.⁷⁵ In other books, to some of which he refers in *Distinction*,⁷⁶ he offers specific examples of such proofs. His arguments there are a mixture of categorical, hypothetical and disjunctive syllogisms, i.e., a composite of Aristotelian and Stoic logic.

⁷³ Cf. R.J. McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Boston, 1980), Appendix I, pp. 145–174. Hourani translates the work, to which Averroes refers on pp. 53, 59, and 80 (Hourani), as 'The book of the decisive distinction between Islam and heathenism,' and 'The book of the distinction' for short. We shall further abbreviate it simply as *Distinction*. The Arabic text has been edited by S. Dunya (Cairo, 1961), and, together with a French translation and semiotic study, by H. Mustapha (Casablanca, 1983). Frank has a brief discussion of *Distinction*, which he regards as essentially apologetic. See his *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School*, pp. 76–79, 100.

⁷⁴ Cf. McCarthy, pp. 151 ff. Al-Ghazālī actually speaks in terms of the various levels at which an object can exist.

⁷⁵ McCarthy, pp. 157 ff.

⁷⁶ McCarthy, pp. 158, 166. The books to which he refers here are *Al-Qistās al-Mustaqīm*, *The Correct Balance*, and *Mahakk al-Nazar*, *The Touchstone of Reasoning*. McCarthy has translated 'The Correct Balance' as Appendix III in his *Freedom and Fulfillment*, pp. 287–332.

Despite his insistence on the necessity of employing demonstrative or apodictic proof as the ultimate criterion for true statements, al-Ghazālī knows that people often reject such proofs, disputing the necessity of the premises. Some, like the Hanbalites, do so as part of their fundamental rejection of the compelling significance of human language and thought; others reject a premise since it is based on a particular tradition which they deny, though the rest of the community accepts it as having been impeccably transmitted, and therefore qualifying as a totally reliable datum.

Al-Ghazālī is able to point to inconsistencies in the literalism and anti-hermeneutic stance of the Hanbalites, but he is less able to critique disagreement over supposedly inerrantly transmitted traditions, *tawātur*.⁷⁷ He is himself, as a faithful Muslim, committed to beliefs based on such traditions; they comprise for him data and premises as reliable as those drawn from any other empirical or logical source.

Indications of al-Ghazālī's acceptance of traditional beliefs as axiomatic truths abound in *Distinction*, as they do in his other work. Thus, among the examples of 'essential existence,' things which are to be predicated '*alā al-ẓāhir*, as they are in themselves (literally, 'exoterically'), without any interpretation or allegorization, al-Ghazālī mentions the 'throne' and 'chair' of God.⁷⁸ Elsewhere, he mentions approvingly various miracles attributed to Muhammad, accepting them literally though acknowledging that they violate the 'customary order.'⁷⁹ Significantly, al-Ghazālī sees here no necessary reason for allegorizing belief in the resurrection of the body; in the existence of a physical afterlife with its rewards and punishments; and in the belief in a Creator God who has particular knowledge of everything.⁸⁰ He seems to have no philosophical problem with these beliefs, so fundamental to the faith; they apparently do not violate the laws of physics or logic.

⁷⁷ McCarthy, pp. 158 f.

⁷⁸ McCarthy, p. 152. Mentioned too are the Qur'ānically designated seven (!) heavens of surah XLI:12.

⁷⁹ McCarthy, p. 171. *Al-āda* is the common kalām term for the 'custom' or 'order' of things which we experience, but which is not inherent in the things themselves. It is possible, as some scholars have claimed (above, note 72), that al-Ghazālī did not believe this notion of *āda* to be in contradiction with a natural world view, as it is in classical kalām theory. Yet his unqualified use of *āda* here, as often elsewhere, weakens this claim, and either opens al-Ghazālī to the charge of inconsistency or forces an esoteric reading upon him which escaped his medieval readers.

⁸⁰ McCarthy, pp. 160 f. A key sentence in the middle of p. 160 has lost two

In taking this position, al-Ghazālī shows his theological colors. While working with syllogistic constructions and accepting the rules of logic, he gives notice that he is not bound necessarily to the dictates of the natural world which those rules usually frame. The world functions 'customarily,' really by God's will, and not naturally, by itself. There is no autonomous nature essentially, and thus no necessary empirical limitation on what may possibly occur. In this theoretically open-ended universe of possibilities, the widespread agreement of the community regarding miraculous events is as reliable a source of cognition for him as his own witnessing of them. Conversely, the use of pure reason and analogy, unrestricted by traditional belief, is highly suspect, leading as it may to theological conundrums.⁸¹

In rising to philosophy's defense in the *Decisive Treatise*, Averroes does not wish to draw attention to this fundamental difference between al-Ghazālī's world view and his own. He seeks rather to emphasize points of agreement, not difference, between them. It is al-Ghazālī, not he, who has violated the legal criteria they both accept, he charges.

Accordingly, Averroes is able comfortably to insist on the legitimacy of allegorical interpretation of the Qur'ān when a given statement conflicts with 'certain' knowledge, i.e., with knowledge based on demonstrative proof.⁸² The language is the same as that of al-Ghazālī, but the meaning and scope of 'demonstrative proof' is vastly different. Nor is al-Ghazālī's appeal to the doctrine of consensus, *ijmā'*, as a limitation on what may be interpreted allegorically, difficult for Averroes to oppose, since al-Ghazālī himself had spoken of the difficulties legal scholars had with invoking *ijmā'* as a proof.⁸³

Averroes may thus with good reason contend in the *Decisive Treatise* that there can never be certainty that a genuine consensus exists in theoretical matters, since, among other things, the inner meaning of what is professed outwardly can never be known.⁸⁴ This rejection of the authority of consensus in theoretical matters allows Averroes in

Arabic words in the translation, and should be read with the addition of the words here italicized: 'So he [the philosopher—A.I.] absolutely must be taxed with unbelief, since there is no apodeictic proof of *the impossibility of ('alā istiḥāla)* returning [the disembodied] spirits to [their] bodies.' Elsewhere, however, al-Ghazālī does offer a non-literal interpretation of the afterlife, as Ibn Ṭufayl noted, and see p. 170 above.

⁸¹ Cf. 'The Correct Balance,' McCarthy, pp. 326 f.

⁸² Hourani, pp. 50 ff.

⁸³ McCarthy, *Distinction*, p. 163.

⁸⁴ Hourani, p. 52.

effect to imply that allegorical interpretation need not be constrained by religious dogma. He can at the same time agree with al-Ghazālī, as he does, that allegorical interpretation is unacceptable where the literal meaning of a statement is coherent at any of the non-allegorical levels of predication, or 'existence,' which al-Ghazālī had mentioned.⁸⁵ Of course, for Averroes coherence is much more rigorously, i.e. philosophically, defined than it is for al-Ghazālī.

Averroes has opened the door, then, in this book to the utilization of allegory for philosophical purposes, yet he barely enters the larger space he has claimed.⁸⁶ *The Decisive Treatise* is more concerned with legitimating philosophy than with philosophizing, more addressed to non-philosophers than to fellow philosophers. This distinction between philosophers and others is central to the book, and to Averroes' political philosophy. Non-philosophers have to be addressed in language which they can understand, be it dialectical or rhetorical.⁸⁷ [On diverse 'textures' of interpretation in medieval Islamic, Jewish, and Christian writing, see chapter 2 (v–viii). —ed.]

The Decisive Treatise employs arguments of both a dialectical and a rhetorical sort on behalf of demonstrative proof. Generally, though, Averroes disapproves of mixing philosophical genres, and particularly of using demonstrative arguments in dialectical and rhetorical compositions. Having employed allegory to legitimate philosophy, he is anxious to restrict its use to demonstrative discourse. Allegorical interpretation is normally to be permitted only to philosophers writing for philosophers. Only they can appreciate the argument which the allegory entails, and the subtlety with which it is expressed allegorically.

Averroes charges al-Ghazālī with ignoring this principle, having used allegory in non-demonstrative books.⁸⁸ It is al-Ghazālī, and not the philosophers, Averroes claims, who have confused people by mixing up literary genres, exposing people to philosophical interpreta-

⁸⁵ Hourani, p. 59. Cf. Averroes' assertion there of the coherence of Islamic beliefs in the afterlife, which therefore prohibit allegorical interpretation. His affirmations are worded so generally that it is difficult to find specific and controversial literal meaning in them. So, too, his acceptance of the existence of God and the 'prophetic missions' on p. 58.

⁸⁶ Averroes' rebuttal of al-Ghazālī's charges of unbelief against the philosophers is brief and mostly unphilosophical in tenor. Cf. Hourani, pp. 54–57.

⁸⁷ Hourani, pp. 63 f.

⁸⁸ Hourani, p. 61, and cf. note 143 there. As Hourani intimates, al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār* (above, note 23) would certainly seem to qualify as an example of a non-demonstrative book, replete with allegorical interpretation.

tions for which they are unprepared. It is not the content of al-Ghazālī's teachings, then, which Averroes would appear to contest, but his methodology.⁸⁹

For Averroes, the need for literary and philosophical discretion is taught by no less an authority than the Qur'ān. Addressed to all people, it accommodates itself to all levels of comprehension, persuading people by rhetorical, dialectical and demonstrative means. People not able to understand abstractions are offered symbolic images and likenesses of the truth.⁹⁰ Philosophers are indeed commanded to understand God's word philosophically, but also alerted to the fact that this is an esoteric level of comprehension not meant to be shared with everyone. Scripture is to be read and interpreted differently by different persons, each interpretation valid on its terms.⁹¹ What God can do, however, man cannot, and thus Averroes does not endorse the use of diverse philosophical genres in the same composition.

Averroes, accordingly, treats allegory in a much more restricted manner than his philosophical predecessors. It is likely that he would have opposed their use of this genre. He completely avoids composing allegories in the manner of Avicenna and Ibn Ṭufayl, and relates only to the act of allegoresis in Qur'ānic exegesis.⁹² His approval of allegory is solely for the purpose of licensing philosophy, in its most rigorous syllogistic form.

The informal and non-syllogistically amenable style of Avicenna's allegories would have disqualified them as philosophical treatises in Averroes' eyes. He would have thought the style confusing to readers, encouraging non-philosophers to believe they understood the author's intentions when they did not. Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory of Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān would likely have been more acceptable to Averroes at first, when Ḥayy based his assertions on logical deductions. Averroes would have despaired, however, once Ḥayy left the scientific approach and

⁸⁹ Were Averroes to express his view of al-Ghazālī as a philosopher in this book, he would find more to critique than his writing style. Averroes' desire to establish harmony between religion and philosophy keeps him from doing this.

⁹⁰ Hourani, p. 59, and see above, p. 169.

⁹¹ Surah III:7 of the Qur'ān serves as the scriptural crux which legitimates both exoteric and esoteric interpretation. Cf. Hourani, pp. 53, 60 and 66, and see his note 87.

⁹² Averroes also may have conceived of Plato's *Republic* as an allegory, his commentary on it a form of allegoresis. This would relieve him of responsibility for seeming acceptance of many of Plato's remarks which Muslims would have found unacceptable.

embarked on his mystical path. He would have felt that Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory, like those of Avicenna, made assertions for which there was little if any scientific and philosophical basis. However, even had both philosophers offered a more consistently Aristotelian message in their allegories, Averroes would have been uncomfortable with their style of writing. Allegory for him is a dangerous and potentially destructive weapon.

Despite their different attitudes towards the use of allegory, all our philosophers understand its potentiality for conveying truths esoterically. They are all aware that this style of writing and interpretation can provoke widespread suspicion and resentment towards philosophy. They therefore are careful to endorse the literal, popular understanding of religion, preferring allegories to be read by the educated elite only. Averroes takes this realization to a logical extreme, adapting allegory to exegetical techniques only, wishing to restrict it to the most rigorous form of logical discourse. This is an indication that his appreciation of poetic, imaginative discourse was much less than that of Avicenna and Ibn Ṭufayl, but that his zeal for empirical data and logically conclusive argument was greater.

From an historical perspective, Averroes may be seen as having correctly analyzed the dangers allegory presented to philosophy. Avicenna's allegories, as possibly those of Ibn Ṭufayl and al-Ghazālī, helped theosophy replace philosophy within Islam, introducing theological beliefs which Averroes would have abhorred. On the other hand, Avicenna and Ibn Ṭufayl enriched Islamic philosophy by emphasizing themes treated more dryly, if at all, by other philosophers. As we have seen, their allegories dwell on the life-long struggle within the human soul for moderation and control of one's passions, and the equally life-long search of the educated person for spiritual meaning in life. The allegories speak to the need we have for transcendence and for redemption. They testify to the powerful attraction in us towards the One, and an intuitive apprehension of the unity of all being.

The inability or reluctance of Averroes to address these concerns directly stemmed from his self-imposed sense of philosophical respectability. In his writings he maintained this respectability, though within the Islamic community there were few prepared to follow him.

ON MAIMONIDES' ALLEGORICAL READINGS OF SCRIPTURE

Warren Zev Harvey

Rabbi Moses ben Maimon's *Guide of the Perplexed*, completed in the final decade of the twelfth century, stands at the junction between Arabic and Latin Aristotelianism. It is the last great book in the 300-year-old tradition of Arabic Aristotelianism, and it had a formative influence on the founders of Latin Aristotelianism in the thirteenth century. The *Guide* contains many fascinating allegorical interpretations of Scripture, and also some discussions about the nature of allegory. [On the self-consciously allusive design of the *Guide* itself, see chapter 2 (vi); on the work's influence upon later Jewish interpretation, see chapters 9 and 13. —ed.] In the following remarks, I shall try to clarify briefly some questions regarding Maimonides' allegorical readings of Scripture.

When should a biblical text be interpreted allegorically? Maimonides' hermeneutical principle is stated clearly in *Guide of the Perplexed*, II, 25. Whenever a decisive scientific demonstration (Arabic: *burhān*) contradicts the literal sense (*zāhir*) of the biblical text, it is obligatory to interpret it by way of allegory (*ta'wīl*). Thus, biblical texts which attribute corporeality to God must be interpreted allegorically since God's incorporeality is demonstrable. Similarly, if it were proved that the universe is eternal *a parte ante* (i.e., with reference to preexistence), it would be obligatory to interpret the opening verses in Genesis in such a way as to insure their accordance with eternal preexistence. As Maimonides remarks: 'the gates of *ta'wīl* are not shut in our faces.'¹

This position of Maimonides was vehemently attacked by Spinoza in his *Theologico-Political Tractatus*, ch. 7. Spinoza held that the Bible

¹ See Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. with introd. and notes by Shlomo Pines, introductory essay by Leo Strauss (Chicago, 1963), p. 327; my translations are adapted from this work. For the Arabic text, see the edition of S. Munk and I. Joel (Jerusalem, 1929).

should be interpreted on its own terms, and passages which clearly contradict reason must be understood in accordance with their clearly irrational meaning. Maimonides' position, according to which such passages must be interpreted allegorically, struck Spinoza as 'noxious, useless, and absurd'; for according to it, one could never know what a biblical text meant until one conducted an independent scientific investigation and determined whether or not its plain meaning contradicted reason.² Of course, Spinoza was able to reject Maimonides' position regarding the allegorical interpretation of Scripture because, unlike him, he was not committed to the reasonableness of the biblical text. [Compare the later position of Vico regarding the interpretation of ancient poetry, discussed in chapter 17. —ed.]

Maimonides' position regarding the allegorical interpretation of Scripture is similar to that of his contemporary and fellow Cordovan, Averroes. Averroes' views on *ta'wīl* are stated succinctly in his *Decisive Treatise* (*Faṣl al-Maḳāl*), and it is quite possible that they influenced Maimonides' formulation in *Guide*, II, 25. According to him, truth is its own witness (cf. Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, I, 32, 47a 8), and thus the truth of reason cannot conflict with that of Scripture; so whenever demonstration (*burhān*) contradicts the literal meaning (*zāhir*) of the Quran, the text must be interpreted by way of allegory (*ta'wīl*).³ [On the interpretive approaches of Averroes and other Islamic philosophers, see chapters 2 (v) and 7. —ed.]

It may be noted in passing that Maimonides states, with regard to those biblical texts which attribute corporeality to God, that their allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) is 'the intention of the text' (*qaṣd al-naṣṣ*; II, 25, p. 328). This expression is absent in Averroes' discussion in the *Decisive Treatise*, and the determination of its precise meaning here requires careful analysis.⁴

² 'Quapropter hanc Maimonidae sententiam ut noxiam, inutilem, et absurdum explodimus'; Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. C. Gebhardt (Heidelberg, 1925), Vol. III, p. 116.

³ See the translation by George F. Hourani in *Averroes: On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London, 1961), p. 50. For the Arabic text, see the edition of Hourani (Leiden, 1959). The *Decisive Treatise* was completed before 1179 in Cordoba, and the *Guide* was composed during the 1180s and early 1190s in Cairo. Since Averroes (1126–1198) and Maimonides (1135/38–1204) belonged to the same Andalusian Arabic Aristotelian tradition, the similarities between them are often adequately explained by their use of common sources.

⁴ Professor Josef Stern, in a communication to me, aptly contrasts Maimonides' statement here regarding his interpretation of anthropomorphisms with his statement regarding his interpretation of the Chariot of Ezekiel: 'no divine revelation [*wahy ilāhī*] has come to me to teach me that the intention [*qaṣd*; or *quṣīda*, accord-

The upshot of *Guide*, II, 25, is that the biblical creation story is to be interpreted in accordance with the demonstrations of physics; and this is indeed what Maimonides does in *Guide*, II, 13–31. For example, in interpreting Genesis 1:1–2, he takes ‘In the beginning’ (*be-reshit*) as referring to an ontological principle (*mabdā* = *archē*), not a temporal beginning (II, 30, pp. 348–49); he explains that ‘the heaven and the earth’ (*ha-shamayim*, *ha-areṣ*) mentioned in the first verse refer to two entirely distinct matters, that of the celestial spheres and that of the sublunar world (II, 26, p. 331); and he finds the four sublunar elements in the second verse—‘the earth’ (*ha-areṣ*) designating earth, ‘darkness’ (*hoshekh*) designating fire, ‘the spirit of God’ (*ruaḥ elohim*) designating air, and ‘the waters’ (*ha-mayim*) designating water (II, 30, p. 351). [On efforts to reconcile the scriptural account of creation with ‘physics’ in medieval Christian interpretation, see chapter 10 and the conclusion of chapter 11. —ed.]

Needless to remark, Maimonides’ view that the biblical creation story is to be interpreted in accordance with the demonstrations of physics is objectionable not only from the critical standpoint of Spinoza; it is objectionable also from the uncritical standpoint of the fundamentalist, who in fact holds the contrary view, viz., physics is derived from the biblical creation story.⁵

It follows from Maimonides’ approach that it is obligatory to interpret figuratively any biblical text which, on the face of it, teaches irrational ideas. Thus, Maimonides undertakes in *Guide*, I, 1–2, to interpret the Garden of Eden story, which, according to its literal or apparent meaning (*zāhir*), teaches a downright scandalous theology: God wanted Adam and Eve to be ignorant like the other animals,

ing to Munk-Joel, p. 297, l. 27] in the matter in question was such and such’ (*Guide*, III, introduction, p. 416). Thus, while Maimonides affirms that some of his allegories reflect the ‘intention’ of the text, he does not affirm this for others. He goes on to say in this passage that his interpretation of the Chariot is based on reason and ‘divine aid’ [*al-ma’ūnah al-ilāhīyah*]. He thus claims for it a degree of divine inspiration somewhere between ‘*ma’ūnah*’ and ‘*wahy*,’ the former term designating the lowly ‘first degree’ of prophecy, and the latter at least the ‘third degree’ (see *Guide*, II, 45). Regarding Maimonides’ ‘inspired’ interpretation of the Chariot, see Abraham Joshua Heschel, ‘Did Maimonides Strive for Prophetic Inspiration?’ (in Hebrew), *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume* (New York, 1945), (Hebrew Section) pp. 159–62. Cf. my ‘How to Begin to Study the *Guide of the Perplexed*, I, 1’ (in Hebrew), *Daat* 21 (1988), 21–23.

⁵ Cf. my ‘Anti-fondamentalisme maimonidien,’ in *Les retours aux écritures: fondamentalismes présents et passés*, ed. Evelyne Patlagean and Alain Le Boulluec (Louvain-Paris, 1993), pp. 313–18.

so He forbade them to pursue knowledge, and when they rebelled against His command, they became divine.

Maimonides' interpretation entirely reverses the *zāhir*: Adam and Eve were *not* transformed from animal to divine, but from divine to animal. They had been created divine ('in the image of God'; Genesis 1:27), having perfect intellectual knowledge, but upon rebelling, were reduced to the level of the other animals, as it is written, 'And thou shalt eat the grass of the field' (Genesis 3:18). Maimonides' interpretation rests on a novel explanation of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This tree symbolizes the 'commonly accepted opinions' (*al-mashhurāt*), that is, the subjective notions of 'good' and 'bad,' as opposed to the scientific concepts of 'true' and 'false.' Adam and Eve, accordingly, had been created perfectly rational, that is, divine, but went astray after their imaginary desires, and, no longer rational, became like the other animals. If a simple reading of the text teaches that Adam and Eve sinned by pursuing *ratio*, Maimonides' allegory teaches that they sinned by abandoning it.

Maimonides' allegorical interpretations of Scripture are often highly creative, and may indeed seem outrageous to the fundamentalist or to the critical Bible scholar, yet they are almost always rooted in classical Rabbinic midrash. Let me give two examples. Both examples concern verses which are crucial to Maimonides' interpretation of the Garden of Eden story. The verses are Genesis 3:22 and Job 14:20.⁶

Genesis 3:22 is usually translated: 'And the Lord God said: "Behold, the man has become as one of us [*mimmenu*], to know good and evil . . ."' This text is so difficult for Maimonides' interpretation that it would not be an exaggeration to say that it threatens to refute his argument completely. After all, the verse presents God as affirming explicitly that knowledge of good and evil is divine ('has become as one of us to know good and evil'). A similar problem had arisen in Genesis 3:5, where the Serpent had explained God's motive for outlawing the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil: 'for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof . . . ye shall be as God [*elohim*] knowing good and evil.' To be sure, Genesis 3:22 is much more problematic for Maimonides than Genesis 3:5, since a direct quotation

⁶ The former verse is discussed in my 'Maimonides on Genesis 3:22' (in Hebrew), *Daat* 12 (1984), 15–22; the latter in my 'Maimonides on Job 14:20 and the Story of the Garden of Eden' (in Hebrew), in *Between History and Literature: Studies in Honor of Professor Isaac Barzilay*, ed. S. Nash (Tel Aviv, 1997), pp. 143–48.

from the Serpent need not be taken as seriously as a direct quotation from God. Basing himself on the Aramaic Targum of Onqelos, Maimonides had defused Genesis 3:5 by treating 'elohim' as an equivocal term, which does not have to mean 'God,' but which may mean 'political rulers'; and he rendered the verse: ye shall be as *political rulers* knowing good and evil. The Serpent would in effect have been saying: If you eat of the Tree, your life will no longer be devoted to science (true and false), but to politics (good and evil). Now, Maimonides' interpretation of Genesis 3:22 (*Eight Chapters*, 8; *Mishneh Torah*, Teshubah 5:1) is also based on the Targum of Onqelos. Onqelos reads the verse in a curious (some might say: outlandish) way. He takes the Hebrew word '*mimmenu*' (which may be third person masculine singular as well as first person plural) as meaning not 'of us' but 'of himself,' and he inserts a comma in front of it. The verse is thus radically reconstructed: 'And the Lord God said: "Behold, the man has become unique, of himself [*mimmenu*] he knows good and evil."' This interpretation felicitously solves Maimonides' problems: knowledge of good and evil is no longer said to be divine or even worthy, and moreover it is hinted that it is subjective ('of himself he knows').

In short, Maimonides' whole interpretation of the Garden of Eden story had depended on his being able to neutralize Genesis 3:22. He neutralized it by means of a bold violation of the literal text. Nonetheless, in doing so he was merely following a precedent found in the classical literature, namely, in the translation of the verse found in the Targum of Onqelos. Maimonides' exegesis of Genesis 3:22, like his interpretation of the Garden of Eden story as a whole, and like his allegorical interpretation of Scripture in general, is radical in both senses of the word. It audaciously uproots the plain meaning of the text, and it is rooted deep in traditional interpretation.

Now to my second example.

Job 14:20 plays an important role in Maimonides' interpretation of the Garden of Eden story. Maimonides uses it to prove that the sin of Adam and Eve consisted in their turning from rationality to fantasy. In the course of explaining the various verses in the Genesis narrative, Maimonides writes: 'Now concerning [Scripture's] dictum with regard to Adam, "he changeth his face and Thou sendest him away" [Job 14:20], the interpretation [*ta'wil*] and explanation of the verse are as follows: when the direction toward which man tended changed, he was driven away,' etc. Now, as readers of *Guide*, I, 2,

we may be understandably surprised to find a verse from Job appearing suddenly among the verses from Genesis. Our surprise may be compounded when we open up our Bibles and discover that Job 14:20 does not speak about Adam at all. It speaks about 'man that is born of a woman' (Job 14:1), which is to say, it speaks about every single human being *except* Adam (and Eve and, as it were, Macbeth). Now, in taking Job 14:20 to refer to Adam, Maimonides is merely following the Midrash (Genesis Rabbah 21:4; cf. 16:1). This midrash has already turned the plain meaning of Job 14:20 on its head. [On the interpretive turns of midrash, see chapter 5. —ed.] That plain meaning is as follows: 'Thou [God] overpowereth him [*titqefehu*] eternally [*la-neṣaḥ*] and he goeth [*va-yahalokh*]; he changeth his face and Thou sendest him away [*va-teshallelhehu*].' Connecting Job 14:20 to Genesis 3:23 ('Therefore the Lord God sent him away [*va-yeshallehehu*] from the Garden of Eden . . .') by means of a term common to both (*va-teshallelhehu/va-yeshallehehu*), the midrash immediately seizes on the opening word of the verse from Job (*titqefehu*), 'Thou [God] overpowereth him.' God eternally overpowers, attacks, prevails against 'man that is born of a woman.' This disquieting, defeatist theology is redolently revised by the midrash. '*Titqefehu*' is transformed from 'Thou overpowereth human beings eternally' to 'Thou giveth eternal power to Adam.' With midrashic magic, God is transformed from Bully to Benefactor. Adam, the midrash teaches, was given eternal power by God, but he 'changed his face,' forsook the way of God, and went in the direction of the Serpent. After the midrash has so thoroughly transformed Job 14:20, nothing is left for Maimonides to do but to identify the way of God with Reason and the way of the Serpent with Imaginary Desires: God created Adam with the perfect eternal power of the intellect (knowing true and false), but Adam rejected the divine for the serpentine.

Maimonides' exegesis of Job 14:20, like his exegesis of Genesis 3:22, exemplifies his double-edged radicalism: uprooting the text, but rooted in traditional interpretation.

One of the wonderful characteristics of allegory is that it can be used either to conceal or to reveal. In some figurative interpretations in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, the literal meaning is exoteric and the allegory esoteric. For example, Genesis 1:1 literally teaches that the heaven and the earth were created at a particular time in the past (a doctrine suitable for vulgar ears, since it presents creation in a palpable way). But allegorically the text teaches the eternal pre-

existence of the universe (a doctrine unsuitable for vulgar ears, since its appreciation requires metaphysical sophistication). In other figurative interpretations in the *Guide*, the literal meaning is esoteric and the allegory exoteric. For example, Genesis 1:26 literally teaches that Adam was created in the physical shape of God (a fact about the text unsuitable for vulgar ears, since it shows that the Bible retains some false and heretical ideas about God). But allegorically the text teaches that our 'divine image' is the intellect (a view suitable for vulgar ears, since this teaching is truly noble and has great educational value for all human beings).

While the question of which texts are to be interpreted allegorically is answered *sub specie aeternitatis*, the question of which teachings are to be esoteric is answered in accordance with the continuously changing cultural scene. Cultural change brings about changes in the role of allegory.

Writing in 1292, about a century after Maimonides composed the *Guide*, Rabbi Isaac Albalag explained why he was able to write openly about the eternity *a parte ante* of the universe, while the Master had to conceal his views. In the time of Maimonides, Albalag wrote, the theory of the eternal preexistence of the universe was so strange to the vulgar that they imagined that whoever affirmed it denied the Torah. But today, he continued, the situation is different. The theory of the eternal preexistence of the universe has been widely publicized, and is no longer strange to the vulgar. However, he concluded, the vulgar today do not distinguish between the heretical Epicurean version of the theory and the true Aristotelian version (which is compatible with the biblical concept of Creation), and therefore it is the present task of philosophers to speak openly about the question, and to clarify the truth.⁷ What had to be concealed in the late twelfth

⁷ 'In the time of the Master [Maimonides], this opinion, that is, that of the eternity *a parte ante* of the world, was so very strange to the vulgar, that they imagined that whoever affirmed the eternity *a parte ante* of the world denied the whole Torah. But today this question has been well publicized among them; and indeed it has become so widespread among them, that the nature of most of them does not recoil from accepting the belief in eternity *a parte ante* as it was held by Epicurus, namely, that the world is eternal *a parte ante* in itself, without a cause. They think that this is the eternity *a parte ante* concerning which the philosophers have a proof, far be it from them! Thus, they wind up denying both the Torah and philosophy. However, when they hear these words of mine, they will know that the philosophers do not believe in absolute eternity *a parte ante*, but in absolute creation'; *Sefer Tiqqun ha-De'ot*, ed. G. Vajda (Jerusalem, 1973), paragraph 30, pp. 51–52; cf. Vajda, *Isaac Albalag: Averroïste juif* (Paris, 1960), p. 166.

century had to be revealed in the late thirteenth century! The vulgar now had to be instructed in the Aristotelian theory of eternity *a parte ante* in order to save them from ignorantly affirming the heretical Epicurean theory. [On Jewish controversies in the late Middle Ages regarding the conditions for diffusing allegories by Maimonides and others, see chapter 9. —ed.] Now, the intriguing point is that the same allegorical readings of Genesis that had served *to conceal* in the late twelfth century were used *to reveal* in the late thirteenth century. Cultural change had turned esoteric allegories into exoteric ones. And what is the status of those allegories at the turn of the twenty-first century?

PHILOSOPHIC ALLEGORY IN MEDIEVAL JEWISH CULTURE: THE CRISIS IN Languedoc (1304–6)

Gregg Stern

Introduction: The Jews of the Midi¹

In the thirteenth century, the three Mediterranean counties of southern France were divided between three kingdoms. Roussillon, in the west, was the possession of the Crown of Aragon; Provence, in the east, was the possession of the Kingdom of Burgundy; Languedoc, in the center, had recently been subjugated and joined to the Kingdom of France.² In spite of these political divisions, common descent and shared cultural patrimony led the Jews of southern France to regard Roussillon, Provence, and Languedoc as one region, which they called 'this land.'³ The earliest traces in this region of Talmud study—the staple of Jewish intellectual life—are to be found at the turn of the eleventh century, perhaps a century behind the other great centers of Europe.⁴ But by the second half of the thirteenth century, the Jews of 'this land' could look back on more than one hundred years of diversified cultural achievement: in Jewish legal scholarship, in the study of the Hebrew language and biblical interpretation, in

¹ The following draws on my study, 'Menahem ha-Meiri and the Second Controversy over Philosophy,' Diss. Harvard U, 1995, chapter 6. Notes in this essay will be limited to selected examples. More detailed documentation can be found in the dissertation itself.

² See J.N. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms: 1250–1516* (Oxford, 1976), p. 243.

³ 'Ha'ares ha-zot.' See, e.g., Menahem ben Solomon ha-Meiri, *Bet ha-Behirah*, 'Avot, Introduction, ed. S.Z. Havlin (Jerusalem, 1991), pp. 126, 136; *Minhat Qena'ot*, ed. Abba Mari ben Moses, in *Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, ed. H. Dimitrovsky, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 359, 367, 372, 408, 824–5; and Yedayah ha-Penini, *Ketav ha-Hitmaslut*, in *She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-Rashba* (Bene Brak, 1958), vol. 1, no. 418, pp. 156b and 157a. In general, titles in transliterated form refer to works in Hebrew.

⁴ Though Jewish settlement in the Midi originates long before the late eleventh century, continuous literary developments begin in the first half of the twelfth century. See I. Twersky, 'Aspects of the Social and Cultural History of Provençal Jewry,' *Journal of World History* 11 (1968): 185–207, and B.Z. Benedict, *Merkaz ha-Torah bi-Provans* (Jerusalem, 1985).

preaching, in polemics, and in poetry. The growth of Languedocian-Jewish philosophic culture during this period—from a sapling into a great tree—affected all of these fields, and contributed to the self-perception of the community. In comparison to that of the neighboring Jewish communities in Spain, northern France, and Germany, the cultural life of Jews in the South of France (the Midi) was young, but their achievements belied this youth.

Spanish Philosophic Fertilization

Following Berber invasions from North Africa in 1147, Jewish life in Andalusia came to an end,⁵ but its culture entered a new phase outside its original borders. Most Andalusian-Jewish scholars moved northward, and a small but important part of the northern movement reached as far as the Midi. Before this new immigration, the Jews of the Midi were scarcely familiar with the Judeo-Arabic tradition of southern Spain. Indeed, southern French Jews had been introduced to the eleventh-century advancements in Andalusian Hebrew grammar by works written originally in Hebrew or by certain early translations.⁶ But Judah ibn Tibbon, an immigrant from Granada, gave the Jews of the Midi *Sefer ha-Riqmah* and *Sefer ha-Shorashim* (1171)—the weighty Hebrew grammar and lexicon of Jonah ibn Janaḥ of Córdoba. Snippets of Kalam philosophy were available earlier in excerpted translations from the writing of Saadia Gaon of Baghdad (and in the commentaries of Abraham ibn Ezra), but the same Andalusian Ibn Tibbon provided the Jews of the Midi with a complete Hebrew version of Saadia's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* (1186). Perhaps southern French Jews had read or heard in synagogue the Hebrew poetry of Solomon ibn Gabirol and Judah ha-Levi,⁷ but

⁵ On these developments, see Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), pp. 1–2.

⁶ The achievements of the tenth-century grammarians Dunash ben Labrat and Menaḥem ibn Saruq were known in Christian Europe. These scholars, however, worked before the critical discovery of the triliteral root by the Cordovan scholar Judah Ḥayyuj. Abraham ibn Ezra (d. 1167), an early traveler from Andalusia, translated three important works by Ḥayyuj and also composed original works in Hebrew.

⁷ The appearance of distinctive Andalusian influence in Languedocian liturgical poetry from the middle of the 1100s, coinciding with the arrival of the early Spanish travelers, is evidence of substantial contact with the literary conventions that had transformed Andalusian Hebrew poetry. See E. Fleischer, *Shirat ha-Qodesh ha-Ivrit* (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 12–3.

thanks to the newly-arrived Ibn Tibbon they might read translations of ibn Gabirol's *Improvement of Moral Qualities* and ha-Levi's *Kuzari*. Were it not for the efforts of Ibn Tibbon and his colleague Joseph Kimḥi, the *Duties of the Heart* of the Saragossa judge and philosopher Bahya ibn Pakuda would have been entirely unknown in the Midi. Then, in the first decade of the thirteenth century, southern French Jewry received in Hebrew translation, from Ibn Tibbon's son Samuel, the greatest Judeo-Arabic work reinterpreting the tradition philosophically, the *Guide of the Perplexed* of Maimonides. And this was only the beginning of the tidal wave of translated knowledge that covered the Jews of the South of France. Subsequent generations of translators, often descendants of the first generation, proceeded to render the works of the great Arabic philosophers and commentators, Avicenna, al-Ghazali, and Averroes, among others, into Hebrew. [On medieval Islamic and Jewish philosophic interpretation before the thirteenth century, see chapters 2 (v–vi), 7–8, and the opening of chapter 13. —ed.] The bulk of the translations described in Steinschneider's awesome *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Berlin, 1893) were produced by and for the Jews of the Midi. The list of translations into Hebrew of Greek, Arabic, and Judeo-Arabic learning in mathematics, astronomy, medicine, ethics, physics, and metaphysics is staggering.

The Jews of the Midi, who supported this translation movement, were extraordinarily curious for this new knowledge.⁸ Considering the radical differences between a culture informed by the questions and categories of Greco-Arabic learning and a principally rabbinic culture of twelfth-century Europe, this curiosity is remarkable. Even more remarkable is that this great transfer of knowledge occurred, in its initial phases, with relative tranquility.⁹ But this tranquility was

⁸ See Twersky, 'Aspects,' pp. 196–8. The translators were aware of a shift in cultural vitality from the Muslim to the Christian world. See Samuel ibn Tibbon, *Ma'amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayim* (Pressburg, 1837), p. 175. They may also have been conscious that, were it not for their efforts, many works of Andalusian-Jewish creativity would have been lost. However, the translators' love for the original, by itself, would have been insufficient to sustain this massive activity.

⁹ It may be conjectured that the Midi's geonic inheritance as well as early contacts with Andalusian Jewish culture prepared many southern French Jews for these developments. The considerable volume of geonic material found in the *Sefer ha-'Eshkol* testifies to the transfer of learning from the East. Part of this heritage was the understanding that *aggadot* which flew in the face of common sense need not be taken literally.

short-lived. Scholars in Languedoc began to appreciate some of the complexities and contradictions of Andalusian Jewry's relationship to philosophic rationalism. At least a few individuals suspected that Maimonides' naturalistic commitments led him to interpret Jewish teachings in ways that were alien to the rabbinic tradition. In 1232, unease with Maimonidean teaching led Solomon ben Abraham of Montpellier and his students to stir the rabbis of northern France to promulgate a universal ban against the works of Maimonides. Other scholars in the South of France then undertook to punish Solomon of Montpellier with excommunication. Soon, the scholars of Catalonia and Castile were drawn into the conflict as well. [On tensions regarding Maimonidean interpretation, compare chapters 8 and 13. —ed.]

During this controversy, David Kimḥi of Narbonne—an elderly Languedocian leader and prominent rationalist—describes himself as unable to find philosophic companionship in the South of France.¹⁰ Although Languedoc was densely populated with Jews devoted to the writings of Maimonides, their understanding of the master's teaching had not progressed to the point that Kimḥi would acknowledge a single peer with whom he might share his concerns.¹¹ Judah Alfakhar, a sophisticated Toledan intellectual, found himself unable to convey successfully—even to Kimḥi—warnings concerning the dangers of Maimonidean naturalism.¹² Languedocian-Jewish philosophic culture was in the early stages of its development. One could not expect from first- or second-generation rationalists the mastery and sophistication that Spanish scholars had achieved in the context of a long-standing relationship with the philosophic tradition. Half a century later, however, circumstances in the Midi had changed entirely. Despite the tension and uneasiness that this new knowledge brought, the Languedocian community embraced the translated texts of Judeo-Arabic culture. The works of Maimonides achieved very wide acceptance, and translations from the Arabic continued apace. In the second

¹⁰ See David Kimḥi to Judah Alfakhar, *Qobes Teshuvot ha-Rambam ve-Iggrotav*, ed. A. Lichtenberg (Leipzig, 1859), III, 3d-4a, as cited and translated by Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture*, p. 96.

¹¹ The rationalist commitment of Languedocian Jews does not contradict this description. Consider, for example, the argumentation of Aaron ben Meshullam during the Resurrection Controversy. See Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture*, pp. 43-6.

¹² See Judah Alfakhar to David Kimḥi, *Qobes Teshuvot ha-Rambam ve-Iggrotav*, III, 3a-b.

quarter of the thirteenth century, Judeo-Arabic and Arabic learning penetrated deeply into the South of France,¹³ and in the third quarter, mere absorption gradually shifted to the production of original work. By the second half of the thirteenth century, it is possible to speak of the maturation of a Languedocian-Jewish philosophic culture and of the growth in the Midi of a community that thought and wrote philosophically.

Philosophic Allegory and Controversy

By the turn of the thirteenth century, radical philosophic interpretation had become much more popular within Languedocian-Jewish culture.¹⁴ Many more scholars, for example, gave credence to the philosophic teaching that the world had not been created but was eternal. (A number of trained philosophers thought they had confronted decisive arguments in favor of this position, and therefore felt compelled to live with the welter of theological problems that it typically entailed.¹⁵ [On the controversial claim for the eternity of the world, see chapter 8. —ed.]) Certain scholars also employed allegory in new ways that endangered the historicity of biblical narrative and, at times, even the literal meaning of the commandments. Often this use of allegory arose out of the desire to resolve philosophic problems which a simple reading of Scripture raised, or the need to have Scripture speak philosophically. (Similar exegetical tendencies among Christians in Languedoc may have encouraged this type of allegoresis as well.¹⁶) Models for the survival of the soul after

¹³ Translators from the second half of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries include: Jacob ben Makhir ibn Tibbon of Montpellier, Solomon ben Moses of Melgueil, Solomon ben Ajjub of Béziers, Kalonymus ben Kalonymus ben Meir, Todros Todrosi, and Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles.

¹⁴ See Isaak Heinemann, 'Die wissenschaftliche Allegoristik des jüdischen Mittelalters,' *Hebrew Union College Annual* 23, pt. 1 (1950-51): 637-43.

¹⁵ See Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 218-20.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. D. Nussey (1913; rpt. New York, 1958); Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, 2 pts. in 4 vols. (Paris, 1959-64); M.-D. Chenu, 'The Symbolist Mentality,' in *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, trans. J. Taylor and L.K. Little (Chicago, 1968), pp. 99-145; Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1952). [On medieval Christian allegorical interpretation, compare chapters 1 (ii), 2 (vii-viii), 10, and 11. —ed.]

death which emphasized the role of the properly developed intellect took greater hold and raised doubts about the relationship between good deeds and immortality. Consciousness had grown among Languedocian Jews of the range of possibilities within the philosophic tradition, and more conservative scholars became concerned.¹⁷

Sometime during 1303, Abba Mari ben Moses of Montpellier wrote to the greatest living authority in Jewish law, Solomon ibn Adret of Barcelona (*Rashba*), asking him to lead an effort to silence a group of philosophic allegorists in Languedoc. With this letter, Abba Mari initiated a turbulent exchange of correspondence about the nature of Jewish tradition and the limits of philosophic interpretation.¹⁸ The exchange involved many other scholars, culminated in a flurry of excommunications (*ḥaramim*), and was discontinued shortly after Philip the Fair's expulsion of the Jews from France in 1306.¹⁹ Almost all of the documents that survive from these exchanges come down to us in a collection edited by Abba Mari entitled *Minḥat Qena'ot* ('An Offering of Zeal').²⁰

¹⁷ See, e.g., Menahem ha-Meiri, *Psalms Commentary*, ed. Joseph Cohn (Jerusalem, 1936), p. 78.

¹⁸ On this controversy, see B.Z. Dinur, *Yisrael ba-Golah* (Jerusalem, 1969), 2.4: 139–274; Joseph Sarachek, *Faith and Reason: The Conflict over the Rationalism of Maimonides* (Williamsport, PA, 1935), pp. 73–127; Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia, 1978), 1: 289–305; Abraham Halkin, 'Yedaiah Bedershi's Apology,' *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA, 1967), pp. 165–84; Abraham Halkin, 'Why Was Levi ben Ḥayyim Hounded?' *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 34 (1966): 65–76; Charles Touati, 'La controverse de 1303–1306 autour des études philosophiques et scientifiques,' *Revue des études juives* 127 (1968): 21–37; Joseph Shatzmiller, 'Rationalisme et orthodoxie religieuse chez les Juifs provençaux au commencement du XIV^e siècle,' *Provence historique* 22 (1972): 261–86; Joseph Shatzmiller, 'Ben Abba Mari la-Rashba: ha-masa u-matan she-qadam le-herem be-Barcelona,' *Mehqarim be-Toledot 'Am Yisrael ve-Eret Yisrael* 3 (1974): 121–37; Marc Saperstein, 'The Conflict over the Rashba's Herem on Philosophical Study: A Political Perspective,' *Jewish History* 1 (1986): 27–38.

All parties to this controversy view the Maimonidean legacy as integral to Jewish tradition. Sarachek, *Faith and Reason*, and D.J. Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy (1180–1240)* (Leiden, 1965), nevertheless refer to it as the 'Second Maimonidean Controversy.' H. Beinart, *Atlas of Medieval Jewish History* (New York, 1992), p. 54, terms this controversy the 'Fourth Controversy over Philosophy.'

¹⁹ On this expulsion, see William C. Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1989), pp. 214–38. The major Jewish centers of the Midi, like Narbonne and Béziers, lay within Languedoc, which was subject to the King of France. Montpellier, although formally a *dominium* of the Kingdom of Majorca, eventually suffered the royal decree. The communities of Provence and Roussillon (e.g., Perpignan) absorbed many of these refugees.

²⁰ To my knowledge, the documents that survive are the following: *Minḥat Qena'ot*, ed. Abba Mari ben Moses, in *Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, ed. Dimitrovsky, cited above in n. 3, a collection of approximately 130 letters from the affair, including the Barcelona

In the synagogues of Languedoc, Abba Mari proclaims, certain Jews deliver sermons of outrageous philosophic allegory, and they have also composed books with such an orientation.²¹

Today, those who break down the fences have multiplied, those who loathe instruction and despise the rebuker at the gates. They hold fast to the waste and abandon the essence. They break the covenant by diminishing their Torah study; they please themselves with the children of strangers;²² they destroy the richness of the Torah. They expound defective interpretations [of Scripture],²³ from which they have written several books. Some of them are submerged in logic, and I have seen men entombed in physics as well. Their cornerstone is the writing of Averroes, and the axis of their foundation is the teaching of Aristotle. They are almost captured in their net, and, fallen into their trap, they have placed their [own] feet in stocks.²⁴

Abba Mari never identifies these reckless Languedocian interpreters, and our knowledge of the content of their sermons is limited to a few slogans:²⁵ the unnamed preachers read Abraham and Sarah as *figurae* for Form and Matter;²⁶ the four matriarchs indicate the four

excommunications and a few other letters that are found also in *She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, cited above in n. 3, vol. 1, nos. 414–7; Simeon ben Joseph, *Hoshen Mishpat*, in D. Kaufmann, 'Simeon b. Josef's Sendschreiben an Menachem b. Salomo,' in *Jubelschrift zum neunzigsten Geburtstag des Dr. L. Zunz* (Berlin, 1884), Hebrew Section, pp. 142–74 (the letter of Simeon, Abba Mari's student, to Menaḥem ha-Meiri, with extensive citation from Meiri's letter to Abba Mari); D. Kaufmann, 'Deux lettres de Siméon ben Joseph,' *Revue des études juives* 29 (1894): 214–28 (a letter to Rashba asking that he condemn the excommunication promulgated by the Montpellier rationalists, and a letter to the author's relatives in Perpignan asking that they request royal permission for his entry into that city); Yedayah ha-Penini, *Ketav ha-Hitnaḥlut*, in *She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, vol. 1, no. 418 (a detailed response to the accusations contained in the Barcelona excommunications, and an argument in defense of the Jews of the South of France and their cultural commitments).

²¹ In a letter to Rashba, Crescas Vidal speculates that a commentary of which he has been told might meet the description of these books. An anonymous philosophizer had written for Todros of Beaucaire a commentary on the Torah transforming the entire text into allegory. Todros told Crescas that the son of the philosophizer had recently ordered that the deteriorating manuscript be copied. Crescas suggests that this might have resulted in its circulation. See *Minḥat Qena'ot*, p. 370.

²² I.e., most likely, philosophy.

²³ I.e., excessive allegorical interpretation.

²⁴ *Minḥat Qena'ot*, p. 272.

²⁵ Examples are collected in David Kaufmann, 'Simeon b. Josef's Sendschreiben an Menachem b. Salomo,' in *Jubelschrift*, cited above in n. 20, German Section, pp. 143–4.

²⁶ 'Abraham and Sarah represent Matter and Form'; see, e.g., *Minḥat Qena'ot*, pp. 316, 345–6. As Abraham represents Form, and Sarah, Matter, these words have been reordered by their author(s) in order to form a rhyme in Hebrew. Yedayah ha-Penini suggests that this interpretation represents an over-expansion of a legitimate

elements; Jacob's twelve sons represent the signs of the zodiac;²⁷ and the Urim and Thummim are, according to reports of their interpretation, an astrolabe.²⁸ Abba Mari finds the antinomian implications of their sermons especially distressing. Their Christian-like reading of the commandments as *figurae* endangers observance,²⁹ and their public discussion of the Torah's inner philosophic meaning violates talmudic law.³⁰ 'They have nearly stripped the Torah of its literal meanings and left it naked,'³¹ he exclaims.

Abba Mari feels that the matter is sufficiently out of control to warrant the intervention of an external authority. He therefore calls upon Rashba to exercise his far-reaching prestige as a legal scholar and to lead Languedocian religious leaders in action against the philosophic preachers. Abba Mari's response is that of a conservative Maimonidean: the philosophic exposition and interpretation of traditional texts should be restricted to those with prerequisite learning and maturity. As a Kabbalist, Rashba does not share Abba Mari's perturbation that the bounds of esotericism have been breached. For him, the true esoteric teaching concerns the commandments' technical modes of operation—the Kabbalistic things which are hinted at by the Torah³²—while physics and metaphysics is a basically valueless and incompatible Greco-Arabic intrusion upon the Jewish tradition.³³ [On relationships between Kabbalah and philosophy, compare

allegorical interpretation of the *aggadah*, 'Abraham is sleeping in the arms of Sarah' (*Bava Batra*, 58a). See *Ketav ha-Hitnašlut*, pp. 158b–59b. In a letter to Rashba, Abba Mari reports this explanation without attribution. See *Minhat Qena'ot*, p. 443.

²⁷ For Yedayah's suggestion as to the original context of this interpretation, see *Ketav ha-Hitnašlut*, pp. 159b–60a.

²⁸ See *Minhat Qena'ot*, pp. 575–86, and *Ketav ha-Hitnašlut*, pp. 160b–61b.

²⁹ Rashba (*Minhat Qena'ot*, p. 412), Abba Mari (*Minhat Qena'ot*, p. 443), Levi ben Ḥayyim (below, note 56), and Menahem ha-Meiri (*Hoshen Mishpat*, p. 166) use a term (*siyyurim*) analogous to the Latin term *figurae* to describe the illicit interpretation. [For Christian use of the term *figura* in a different, 'typological' form of interpretation with a specifically Christological emphasis, see chapters 1 (ii) and 2 (iv). —ed.]

³⁰ See *Minhat Qena'ot*, p. 316.

³¹ 'Kim'at hijshitu yeshate ha-torah.' *Minhat Qena'ot*, chap. 37, p. 408 (Abba Mari ben Moses to Moses ben Samuel of Perpignan).

³² See Rashba, 'Teshuvah le-Hakhme Provans,' in *Seder Rav 'Amram Ga'on*, ed. A.L. Frumkin (Jerusalem, 1912), 39b–40b (a reference that I owe to Professor Moshe Idel), and in Jacob ibn Ḥabib, *En Ya'akov* (Warsaw, 1926), 46a–47a. The unique manuscript source of this *responsum* appears to be Bodleian MS 2696, fol. 77b, margin. See A. Neubauer, *Catalogue of Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford, 1906), 2:89. The precise historical circumstances of the *responsum*, however, are unclear.

³³ Despite this harsh rejection of the rationalist claim that philosophy is part of

chapter 13. —ed.] Nonetheless, the Barcelona rabbi's outcry against the philosophic preachers for undoing the laws and the narratives of the Torah is just as forceful:

They falsify the whole Torah, and he is considered wise who plots to discover an antinomial interpretation of a commandment. They allegorize [*ya'amiq*], even in writing, as one who burrows under [the Law]. Their intention is clearly recognizable: to say that the commandments are not to be taken literally. 'For why should God care whether an animal is slaughtered by the neck or the throat?!'³⁴ . . .

Just consider the other nations!³⁵ They would punish [such individuals] as heretics for just one of the things—the corrupt teaching—which they write in their books! If any [Christian or Muslim] would say that Abraham and Sarah represent Form and Matter, they would put him on the pyre and burn him to lime! All nations claim descent from [Abraham and Sarah], and [this heretic says] that they are but *figurae* [*siyyurim*], they and their descendants.³⁶

Rashba seems to imply that the allegorical excesses of the Languedocian preachers involve a heretical departure from a religious tradition held in common with Christians and Muslims.³⁷ Jews should not tolerate such heresy any more than would Gentiles, he argues. Above all, Rashba thinks that these preachers seek to destroy the Law through allegory. [On Christian and Islamic attitudes toward the 'literal' sense in their respective sacred texts, compare chapters 1 (ii, iii), 2 (iv, viii), 4, 6, 7, and 11. —ed.]

Judaism, Rashba's relationship to rationalist teachings and sensibilities is actually quite complex. See, e.g., his *responsum* concerning the 'Prophet from Avila,' *Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, ed. Dimitrovsky, no. 34, pp. 100–7.

³⁴ Cf. *Bereshit Rabbah*, ed. J. Theodor and H. Albeck, 2nd printing with corrections, 3 vols. ([1935–6]; rpt. Jerusalem, 1965), 44:1, p. 424. This text, expressing doubt over God's concern for the details of ritual slaughter, became a *locus classicus* for the medieval discussion of 'reasons for the commandments.'

³⁵ Literally, 'the Isles of Kittim which belong to the Phoenicians (*kena'anim*).' Compare Jeremiah 2:10 and Obadiah 1:20. On the medieval Hebrew use of the term '*kena'anim*' to designate the peoples of Europe, see Samuel Krauss, 'Die hebräischen Benennungen der modernen Völker,' in *Jewish Studies in Memory of George A. Kohut*, ed. Salo W. Baron and Alexander Marx (New York, 1935), pp. 379–400.

³⁶ Rashba (and the fourteen other signatories from Barcelona) to the Sages of Montpellier, in *Minhat Qena'ot*, chap. 38, p. 412.

³⁷ Cf. Rashba, *Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, ed. Dimitrovsky, no. 37:2, pp. 161–6.

Christian Allegoresis

Rashba describes recent Languedocian-Jewish philosophic interpretation as more extreme in its misappropriation of the text than Christian allegoresis.³⁸ Abba Mari's student, Simeon ben Joseph, describes the new Jewish interpretation as Christian in method.³⁹ Menaḥem ben Solomon ha-Meiri of Perpignan, the preeminent southern French halakhist at the turn of the thirteenth century,⁴⁰ also considered the exegesis of local Jewish radicals in relation to Christian interpretation. In his commentary on a passage in Mishnah 'Avot, he demonstrates an awareness of the affinities between the two groups of interpreters, and he condemns the use by Jews of Christian modes of interpretation. Any Jew who employs their exegetical techniques, he explains, has no share in the World to Come.

'... If a man discloses meanings of the Law improperly [... he has no share in the World to Come].'⁴¹ That is: he presents himself as if he knows the Secrets of the Torah, and he uncovers them as antinomian meanings. ['He has no share'] because he denies the 'apparent' [*nigleh*] level entirely. He says that this was not God's intention; rather, it is an allegory [*masnal*] for something else, while the 'apparent' meaning is nothing at all. This is one of the roots of heresy, because—although some of the commandments do have a 'hidden' [*nistar*] meaning—the 'apparent' meaning is without doubt the principal intention of the commandment.

This matter requires more expansive explanation: the person who holds this belief says that the intention of the Torah is *not* that one should not eat the flesh of swine. Rather, [he says] that the Torah's prohibition of swine flesh is purely allegorical [*masnal*], meaning that one's character should not be unseemly or dirty. Anyone who says this—if *he is one of our nation*—is a heretic and has no place in the World to Come.⁴²

³⁸ See *Minḥat Qena'ot*, p. 381. If Christians interpret 'two or three biblical verses' allegorically, the radical Jewish writers 'do not leave a single letter of the Torah' free of allegorical interpretation.

³⁹ See *Hoshen Mishpat*, p. 151. The Jewish allegorists 'interpret the Torah and its commandments following Christian rules.'

⁴⁰ On Meiri see, most recently, Moshe Halbertal, 'R. Menaḥem ha-Me'iri: ben Torah le-Hokhmah,' *Tarbiz* 63 (1995): 63–118.

⁴¹ '*Megaleh fanim ba-torah she-lo kha-halakhah [... 'en lo heleq la-'olam ha-ba']*' (cf. 'Avot 3:11; in other editions, 3:15).

⁴² Meiri, *Bet ha-Behirah*, 'Avot, ed. S.Z. Havlin (Jerusalem, 1994), 3:11, pp. 127–9; here and elsewhere I have placed in quotation marks or italics certain expressions used by Meiri. In response to a parallel Mishnaic passage, Meiri briefly restates this

The inappropriate allegorization of biblical narrative might be impious, and might even impugn certain fundamental beliefs. A thorough allegorical reading of a commandment, however, presents an even more immediate and tangible concern: it might throw daily practice into disarray. The interaction of allegoresis and 'reasons for the commandments' is therefore a vital context in which to discuss the parameters of interpretation.⁴³ As an example of antinomian allegory, Meiri chooses a standard Christian interpretation of the prohibition of eating pig—and tacitly points to its Christian context. Meiri's argument implies that certain Languedocian Jews did daringly present this prohibition, like Christians, as a moral allegory.⁴⁴ He reads the mishnah to say: it is a grave crime to use allegory, as Christians do, to vitiate the apparent sense of the Law.⁴⁵

Languedoc's Philosophic Elite

These views regarding radical Jewish allegoresis notwithstanding, Meiri condemns Abba Mari's activity: a ban against Aristotle's works and their commentaries simply has no point, he says. Aristotle's works are generally unfamiliar to the preachers of destructive allegory,⁴⁶ and are obviously not the basis for synagogue sermons. Not the classical texts of philosophy, but philosophically informed works by Jewish authors are the source of the community's problems.

[The] decree [prohibiting the study of philosophy] has not ameliorated this [troubling situation regarding radical interpretation] at all, because the preacher does not expound upon Aristotle's *Physics*, *De caelo*, *Meteorologica*, *De generatione et corruptione*, *De sensu et sensato*, *De anima*, and *Metaphysics*.⁴⁷ Some of them do not even know one page of this

interpretation. See Meiri, *Bet ha-Behirah*, *Sanhedrin*, ed. I. Ralbag (Jerusalem, 1970), 11:1.

⁴³ Meiri's conservative position concerning 'reasons for the commandments' rigorously follows the lines established by Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*. See *Mishneh Torah*, *Me'ilah*, 8:8, and I. Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven, 1980), pp. 407–8.

⁴⁴ The Barcelona excommunications also claim that the Languedocian radicals questioned the literal nature of the prohibition to eat swine. See *Minhat Qena'ot*, pp. 721 and 735.

⁴⁵ For the prohibition of swine flesh as moral allegory, see, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-IIae, q. 102, a. 6, ad 1.

⁴⁶ See *Hoshen Mishpat*, pp. 154, 155, 165.

⁴⁷ Meiri is most likely referring to Averroes' paraphrase commentaries. This is a

literature, but only that which they have read in the Revered Book [the *Guide of the Perplexed*], the *Malmad* [*ha-Talmidim* of Jacob Anatoli], the *Ecclesiastes Commentary* and the treatise 'Let the Waters Be Gathered!' [of Samuel ibn Tibbon], and other books, new and old. . . .⁴⁸

Meiri describes the activities of the preachers as a misuse of the teachings of Maimonides, Jacob Anatoli, and Samuel ibn Tibbon. The *Guide of the Perplexed*, the *Malmad ha-Talmidim*, and the commentaries of Ibn Tibbon are certainly not susceptible to a ban, and some other means to control the troubling interpretation shall have to be found. Meiri regards the two esteemed Languedocian authors, Anatoli and Ibn Tibbon, as essential to his community's tradition, despite the fact that his interpretation is often quite distant from theirs. Meiri goes to great lengths to deflect any suspicion that their teachings represent some philosophically sophisticated heresy. He upholds their stature and insists that their philosophically inspired and often radical works find refuge within local Houses of Study. Without identifying his defendants, Meiri argues that scientific works by Jews should be judged as wholes, while singular problematic teachings should not be overly scrutinized.

Indeed, philosophy [*hokhmah*] is precious in my eyes, and of great value—everything that the scholars of Israel wrote about it—its general principles and its details. And if, upon occasion, I discover in some work something which, perhaps, is in need of correction, I attribute this to the weakness of my intellect, and I set it aside for one who knows more than myself. 'Let that one enter "within" to wander in [esoteric] gardens, and gather a rose among thorns.'⁴⁹ I will not abandon a book full of several gems on account of one, two, or three questionable items. At times, I reread a passage repeatedly so that I might—as much as is appropriate in relation to the author's stature—judge it meritoriously. So much the more so, if we recall the talmudic statement [concerning the canonization of the theologically problematic book of Ecclesiastes, of which it is asked, 'Yet why did they not hide it?'], 'Because its beginning and end are Torah teaching.'⁵⁰

list of the whole Hebrew Aristotle, with the exception of the *Organon*, *De animalibus*, and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which Meiri probably did not consider relevant for this context. In 1305 (when Meiri wrote these remarks), there remained very few important Arabic philosophical treatises which had yet to lower their linguistic barriers before Languedocian Jews in Hebrew translation.

⁴⁸ *Hoshen Mishpat*, pp. 166–7.

⁴⁹ Cf. Song of Songs 6:2.

⁵⁰ *Hoshen Mishpat*, pp. 157–8 (cf. *Shabbat* 30b).

If the author whose writing appears problematic is of the highest stature, Meiri will spare no effort to justify him: I must have misunderstood, due to my insufficient philosophic knowledge; or, forceful interpretation will produce a more satisfying reading. But he also implies that these books are full of thorns, and that one must read carefully in order to pick the rose. Even so, such a book should be preserved by the religious community, just as the Rabbis preserved the frequently troubling book of Ecclesiastes.

Abba Mari advocated a ban on philosophic study before the age of twenty-five as a means to set philosophic interpretation in Languedoc back toward a more proper course. Meiri, however, rejects this proposal as much on account of its effect upon the image of Languedocian-Jewish rationalism, as on account of the restrictions which the ban would enact. In fact, the practical consequences for the Midi of such restrictions on philosophic study appear negligible. Joseph ibn Kaspi of Argentière (d. 1340), an aggressive proponent of the philosophic interpretation of Judaism, advises his son not to study the *Guide of the Perplexed* before the age of twenty.⁵¹ As the *Guide* was specifically excluded from any proposed restrictions, Kaspi's son would need to wait only five years before he might move on to Averroes. Meiri, however, accuses Abba Mari of plotting—along with an unsympathetic Kabbalist, Rashba—to destroy Languedocian-Jewish culture.

I know, my lord [Abba Mari], I know that many have aroused the arrow of your intellect, and have induced you and our lord, the Rabbi [Rashba], to put an end to the sciences [*hokhmah*], and to expel them almost entirely from our heritage. . . .⁵²

Meiri's philosophic conservatism—as exemplified by his position on the consequential question of Creation⁵³—stands in very great tension with his forbearance for the more radical elements of Languedocian-Jewish culture. But his desire to protect this culture in its mature and philosophically sophisticated form overcame the reservations that he surely had in regard to the teachings of some of its members.

⁵¹ Joseph Kaspi, *’Iggeret Musar*, in *Jewish Ethical Wills*, ed. I. Abrahams (Philadelphia, 1926), 1:145.

⁵² *Hoshen Mishpat*, p. 156. The last words of Meiri's formulation are based upon a verse which continues, '[They have driven me out today from a share in the Lord's heritage] saying, "Go and worship other gods"' (1 Samuel 26:19). Meiri's educated reader would likely provide this conclusion of his own accord.

⁵³ See my study, 'Menahem ha-Meiri and the Second Controversy over Philosophy,' cited above in n. 1, pp. 182–91.

Philosophers and Their Abuse of Allegory

Nonetheless, Meiri does not deny that philosophic allegory has gone to excess in public presentation in Languedoc.⁵⁴ He denounces the local philosophic preaching as 'the evil that renews itself daily before thousands of men, because the preachers have become a daily troupe that sing their song and disperse.'⁵⁵ In a tone quite similar to his anti-rationalist adversaries, Meiri expresses great concern for the abuse of the Torah and for the honor of his country.

The nakedness of this country [Languedoc] and our shame, that ignorant men continuously rise against us and preach in public. They teach antinomian interpretations of the Torah,⁵⁶ and out of the literal sense of Scripture produce far-fetched *figurae* [*siyyurim*], which have no basis in the biblical text or rabbinic tradition.⁵⁷

The philosophical preachers undo the legal portions of the Torah, and to the narrative portions they assign fanciful and unprecedented meanings. Meiri was therefore pleased with Abba Mari's early local efforts to put a stop to such preaching in the synagogues of Languedoc.

Your fame, [Abba Mari,] reached us long ago when you began to show your greatness and your mighty hand in order to put an end to those public sermons; either by consensus, ban, or curse; either to put an end to them entirely, or to permit [the preachers] only to use the Torah, Talmud, and Midrash, and occasionally to explain an *aggadah* or a biblical verse on the basis of philosophy [*hokhmah*][—]concerning a matter where there is no tearing down [of fundamental beliefs] or disclosure of one of the Secrets of the Torah and Prophecy.

⁵⁴ Abba Mari's adversaries for the most part deny the existence of philosophically inspired heresy. See, e.g., *Minhat Qena'ot*, chap. 30, pp. 365–72 (Crescas Vidal in defense of Samuel ha-Sulami); chap. 58, pp. 506–13 (Jacob ben Makhir ibn Tibbon to Rashba); and *Ketav ha-Hitnaḥlut*, p. 157a (Yedayah ha-Penini to Rashba).

⁵⁵ *Hoshen Mishpat*, p. 167. Cf. *Hullin* 91b; like the angels who are created to perform only one specific function, the preachers, as it were, stem from some perpetual source.

⁵⁶ See the passage from *Avot* to which n. 41, above, refers. Levi ben Abraham ben Hayyim of Villefranche-de-Confient, the only known figure to have been persecuted as a radical allegorizer, gives this Mishnaic idiom the same sense as Meiri. See Levi ben Hayyim, *Livyat Hen*, VI:32, as cited in Halkin, 'Why Was Levi ben Hayyim Hounded?': 71. Abba Mari and Rashba also employ this Mishnaic idiom in the same sense. See Abba Mari, *Minhat Qena'ot*, p. 575, and Rashba, *Minhat Qena'ot*, p. 345. Perhaps this was a common understanding of the idiom in this period due to the great concern over the correct use of allegory.

⁵⁷ *Hoshen Mishpat*, p. 166.

We rejoiced upon [hearing] your purpose like one who discovers a massive treasure. We venerated it, praised it, approved it, and fulfilled it as seemed fit. We thought, 'By your hand the Lord will grant us respite from those who anger and sadden us,' for the righteous act only righteously. Daily we yearned for your plans to come to fruition. [We thought,] 'We will rejoice and be glad on your account. We will esteem your efforts more than wine. The upright will love you for months or years.'

While we were still speaking [your praises], this [letter] arrived saying that since your [Abba Mari's] counsel was not executed in its time, you [Abba Mari] have made the earth tremble, you have cloven it, you have positioned yourself to argue before our master [Rashba], the Rabbi, and you have placed [your case before him] for judgment—so that the sciences [*hokhmah*] might be handed over to despoilers, and its students to ruin.⁵⁸

Meiri does not appear overly concerned about precisely how the preachers are to be brought back into interpretive compliance; but he does not think it necessary to remove allegorical interpretation from public sermons altogether. In order to protect the literal meaning of the Torah's laws and the historicity of many of its narratives, he would rather restrict the application of allegory. In addition, he would enforce the prohibition against public exposition of the Torah's 'Secrets'—the allegorical interpretation of those texts that both Meiri and the preachers held to contain statements of Judaism's esoteric lore.⁵⁹ Had Abba Mari followed this original plan—and refrained from turning to Rashba in an attempt to overcome local Jewish leaders—he would have found Meiri's full support instead of his forceful opposition.

Meiri's Philosophic Hermeneutics

Meiri's discussion of biblical hermeneutics clarifies the way in which philosophic sermons in Languedoc shifted from the allegory that he permitted and himself practiced to the allegory that he prohibited and polemicized against. Meiri speaks of Scripture as divisible into

⁵⁸ *Hoshen Mishpat*, p. 150. I do not believe that the letter to which Meiri refers survives.

⁵⁹ For a similar argument, cf. Yedayah ha-Penini, *Ketav ha-Hitnaṣhut*, pp. 157a and 157b–58a.

three types of texts that should be interpreted in three different ways.⁶⁰

Our Torah and Holy Books may be divided into three categories. The *first* category consists of [those texts] which should be understood only according to their 'hidden' [*nistar*]⁶¹ meaning, not according to their 'apparent' [*nigleh*] meaning. . . . All the verses referring to the corporeality of God, may He be praised, or His bodily parts—as well as *aggadot* and stories of impossible occurrences that have no connection to miracles and wonders—should be understood after this manner of interpretation.⁶²

In Meiri's first textual category, elements of biblical narrative which present philosophic problems are given exclusively figurative interpretations. One such group of narrative elements consists of references to God's body. It is known that God has no body—as a body would imply in Him multiplicity and imperfection.⁶³ Biblical texts that refer to God's body must therefore be interpreted so as to negate their literal meaning.⁶⁴ Meiri also takes certain *aggadot* to belong to this textual category.⁶⁵ [On references to divine 'corporeality' and on *aggadah* in earlier Jewish interpretation, see chapters 5 and 8. —ed.]

Meiri's second category is the inverse of his first: biblical texts that must be interpreted literally. In the first category, texts that seemed

⁶⁰ Yedayah ha-Penini speaks of two types of biblical texts and four types of aggadic texts, and considers whether each should receive literal or non-literal interpretation. See *Ketav ha-Hinshlut*, pp. 169b–71b. Centuries earlier, Saadia Gaon spoke of four conditions under which a biblical text should be removed from its literal sense. See *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. S. Rosenblatt (New Haven, 1948), 2:17, p. 415.

⁶¹ Maimonides uses the word '*nistar*' in this sense—allegorical without external meaning—in his description of the exegetical basis of Christianity. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Kings*, 11:4 (uncensored editions).

⁶² Meiri, *Bet ha-Behirah*, 'Avot, ed. Havlin, cited above in n. 42, 3:11, p. 132.

⁶³ Cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I:35.

⁶⁴ Another instance of an element of biblical narrative that belongs to this category is the story of the building of a tower to the heavens—which God and His Court frustrated. Meiri interprets it as a trope for the builders' arrogant denial of things divine. See Meiri, *Bet ha-Behirah*, 'Avot, 3:11, p. 132. For Meiri, the existence of a tower, stairway, or fortress that reaches the heavens—and God—is absurd. An interpretation of such a narrative element must therefore vitiate its 'apparent' meaning. For the exciting and consequential *Quellenforschung* of this biblical interpretation, see Halbertal, 'R. Menahem ha-Me'iri: ben Torah le-Hokhmah,' 114–8.

⁶⁵ He would therefore most likely view the *aggadah* of the entombed patriarch Abraham lying in the arms of his wife Sarah as having no literal meaning. He might even have accepted the interpretation that the talmudic text was a description of the relationship between Form and Matter. See above, note 26.

to imply philosophic problems were assigned new, non-literal meanings. In the second category, texts are protected from allegorical interpretation.

The *second* category consists of [those texts] which should be understood only according to their 'apparent' meaning. [This category includes] the 'intelligible commandments,' which would be fitting for mankind to observe even if they had not been commanded, like the prohibitions against murder, theft, and robbery, as well as honoring one's father and mother, and the like. These have no 'inner meanings,' and make reference to nothing other than themselves. [This category also includes] the story of the Creation, and other miracles.⁶⁶

In the description of this category, Meiri prohibits the allegorical interpretation of texts like those that had been the subject of the problematic sermons in Languedoc. The Creation story, like the prohibition of murder, is not to sacrifice its literal meaning. Miracles are to be understood as they were related. Meiri also makes an analogy between the minor details of commandments and the minor details of narrative. Post-Maimonidean rationalists generally held it futile to assign philosophic meaning to legal details which could not avoid being specified.⁶⁷ Meiri claimed that it was similarly futile to assign meaning to narrative details which could not help but be related: once it was commanded that sheep were to be sacrificed on a certain day, there would be a specific number of offerings. So, too, once the name of Eliphaz's concubine was given, she could not have a different one. As both types of details were enumerated out of necessity, neither should have any deeper intentions. Meiri accuses the preachers who would violate this logic of foolishness and heresy. Only if there is some moral lesson to be derived from a necessary narrative detail may this interpretive restriction be relaxed.

Meiri's third category is designed to distinguish between interpretation that replaces the literal meaning of a commandment and interpretation that deepens it. As long as the revealed 'hidden' meaning leaves the 'apparent' sense in place, such uncovering is desirable.

The *third* category is [those texts] whose 'apparent' meaning is their principal intention, but which point to some 'hidden' meaning that issues from [the principal intention] and is more exalted than it. . . . The commandments [in this category] are to be fulfilled based upon

⁶⁶ Meiri, *Bet ha-Behirah*, 'Avot, 3:11, p. 133.

⁶⁷ Cf. Maimonides, *Guide*, III:26.

their 'apparent' meaning, but are to be understood based upon their 'hidden' meaning. [The 'hidden' meaning] will be the 'fruit' of the commandment, while the fulfillment of its 'apparent' meaning will guard the 'fruit.'⁶⁸

In Meiri's first textual category, a 'hidden' meaning simply *replaces* the problematic literal element of narrative. In his third category, interpretation sustains the literal meaning and *adds* a new, 'hidden' meaning. To illustrate this third category, Meiri mentions two examples: the prohibition to shave certain parts of the head, and the commandment to rest on the Sabbath. The prohibition of shaving, he explains, may be intended to prevent a practice which could lead to idolatry.⁶⁹ Rest on the Sabbath inculcates the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, which in turn allows for the possibility that the world's laws might be temporarily altered by their Founder. In regard to both examples, Meiri explains, the interpretation of the commandment does not obviate its literal observance; in fact, it may enhance it.

Meiri, in sum, objects to the application of exegetical techniques to laws and historical narratives that he permits, employs, and even requires for the interpretation of other categories of Scripture, as well as problematic *aggadot*. With an analogy to various species of fruit, Meiri attempts to clarify and concretize the type of interpretation appropriate to each of his three textual categories.

The textual category in which only the 'hidden' meaning is to be accepted resembles those fruits whose shell is discarded and whose inner part is consumed, 'like the first fig to ripen on the fig tree,'⁷⁰ almonds, peanuts, and their kind.

The textual category in which only the 'apparent' meaning is to be accepted resembles those fruits whose shell is consumed and whose core is discarded, like the citron, the pear, and the apricot.

The textual category in which the 'apparent' meaning is to be fulfilled while the 'hidden' meaning is to be believed resembles those fruits whose shell and core are consumed together, like 'grapes in the wilderness'⁷¹ and their kind.⁷²

⁶⁸ Meiri, *Bet ha-Behirah*, 'Avot, 3:11, p. 134.

⁶⁹ Cf. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, 'Avodah Zarah, 12:1; *Sefer ha-Misvot*, Lo' Ta'aseh, no. 43; *Guide of the Perplexed*, III:37.

⁷⁰ Cf. Hosea 9:10.

⁷¹ Cf. Hosea 9:10.

⁷² Meiri, *Bet ha-Behirah*, 'Avot, 3:11, pp. 135–6.

Meiri *requires* allegorical interpretation—like the shelling of a peanut—for philosophically problematic narrative elements whose ‘apparent’ meaning must be discarded. He *prohibits* allegoresis of intelligible commandments, so that their literal sense may be enjoyed—like an apricot whose core is left uneaten—without the complication of a deeper meaning. He *endorses* allegorical interpretation which preserves the ‘apparent’ sense of those commandments that—like a grape whose skin and fruit are both consumed—possess two levels of meaning.

Whether a proposed ‘hidden’ meaning actually deepened—or undermined—the ‘apparent’ meaning of a text for its audience was a delicate and uncertain matter that gave rise to much uneasiness in Languedoc. Meiri therefore hoped to steer the radical allegorists in his community away from those texts where the dangers of antinomianism and excessive naturalism were most significant (categories two and three), turning them towards those texts that the rationalist tradition had established as rich in philosophic insights (category one).

You [Abba Mari] should have expended maximum effort [to combat philosophic sermons]. Not that I would disallow them entirely, but I would loosen the rein for [the preachers] to allegorize as they please in Job, Proverbs, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, the *midrashim*, the *aggadot* that are related to [philosophic] matters, and some of the Psalms that are related to physics.

But they should not extend their hand to the three accounts of the Chariot,⁷³ the account of Creation, any of the Secrets of the Torah and Prophecy and their profundities, or the few *aggadot* which relate to these matters.⁷⁴

Meiri himself followed this advice. In response to an exegetical problem which he finds in a highly esteemed literal interpretation of an *aggadah*, he actually proposes a new, allegorical interpretation.⁷⁵ But in *Bet ha-Behirah*, *Hagigah*, commenting on the passages which hint at the Torah’s secret teaching, Meiri comments laconically, ‘These talmudic *aggadot* contain many esoteric statements concerning the “Account of Creation” and the “Account of the Chariot” which it is not within the bounds of this work to explain.’⁷⁶ *Bet ha-Behirah* is devoted to the study of talmudic law, and justifiably passes over

⁷³ Ezekiel 1:1–28; 8:1–4; and Isaiah 6:1–13.

⁷⁴ *Hoshen Mishpat*, p. 167.

⁷⁵ See Meiri, *Bet ha-Behirah*, ‘*Avot* 5:7, pp. 235–43.

⁷⁶ Meiri, *Bet ha-Behirah*, *Hagigah*, ed. I. Lange (Tel Aviv, 1956), 2:1 (p. 28).

much talmudic *aggadah* in silence. At this point in his commentary, however, Meiri wishes to inform us that he is constrained by the bounds of esotericism.

Meiri views Abba Mari's call to Barcelona after the failure of his early local efforts against the preachers of philosophic allegory as a brash endangerment of Jewish culture in the Midi. Meiri acknowledges the heretical abuse of allegory in the South of France, but claims that it can and should be addressed, not by restricting southern French Jewish culture, but by redirecting the attention of the allegorizing preachers. In turning to Rashba, Abba Mari contributed not only to the slander of prominent scholars in Languedoc,⁷⁷ but also to the defamation of the cultural ideal of Languedocian Jewry.

They [in Barcelona] have added transgression to their words saying, 'Once philosophy spread out over that country [Languedoc], piety and fear of sin ceased. There is no one who knows [philosophy] from his youth who fears God.' But God is indeed in this place!⁷⁸ You [Abba Mari] know well that there is [fear of Him] here! Put out your hand [in covenantal agreement, so that we can pull you aboard]!⁷⁹

Meiri appeals to Abba Mari to join, with a sign of fidelity, his own community of God-fearing, philosophically-educated Jews.

Conclusion

On account of the controversy and the documents collected in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, it is possible to view a community struggling with the interaction of philosophic allegory and cultural change. There exist a full range of responses to the incorporation of Judeo-Arabic and Arabic learning within Languedocian Jewry and the growing philosophic sophistication of many of its members. Abba Mari, an extremely conservative rationalist, hoped to reverse these developments; to make philosophic knowledge and interpretation an esoteric discipline; and to reduce their effect upon southern French Jewish culture. To help

⁷⁷ Meiri inquires solicitously concerning rumors that, in one of his letters to Rashba, Abba Mari had maligned Jacob ben Makhir. As Jacob, who had recently died, was a chief adversary of Abba Mari in Montpellier, there would have been adequate motive. But Simeon ben Joseph, Abba Mari's student, praises ben Makhir and vociferously denies the charge. See *Hoshen Mishpat*, pp. 153–4.

⁷⁸ Cf. Genesis 28:16.

⁷⁹ Meiri, *Hoshen Mishpat*, p. 157 (cf. 2 Kings 10:15).

him accomplish this task, Abba Mari turned to Rashba, a Kabbalist, an anti-rationalist, and the greatest living authority on Jewish law. Menaḥem ha-Meiri, the leading talmudist of the Midi, would protect the advanced and more public character of philosophic learning within his community while restraining its interpretive violations. Despite his own conservative views, ha-Meiri had more respect for his philosophically-learned colleagues and greater tolerance for their more radical interpretations. In the first decade of the fourteenth century—the eve of the Languedocian community's expulsion and gradual dissolution—the delights and unease of allegoresis are at the very center of Jewish cultural preoccupation.

PHILOSOPHY, COMMENTARY, AND MYTHIC NARRATIVE IN TWELFTH-CENTURY FRANCE

Winthrop Wetherbee

The early twelfth century is an important time in European education. Urban culture, commercial and professional in outlook, was becoming a counterweight to the traditional dominance of aristocratic wealth and privilege, and the bureaucratization of government and administration in Church and state was creating new avenues for advancement and new functions for educated men. One consequence was that education itself assumed a new prestige. The Liberal Arts were becoming the province of cathedral schools located in urban centers, and competition among masters in these schools is a striking feature of the period.¹ Abelard is only the best known of those *magistri* who achieved fame through acknowledged expertise in a particular art or area of study. Secular learning—the Liberal Arts and the ancient authors whose writings defined their scope and function—was valued not simply as a means to the understanding of Scripture and religious truth, but as enlarging the sphere of mental activity, making the study of man and nature a complement to traditional religious studies.

The scholars with whom this essay is concerned, whose names have been persistently associated with the cathedral school at Chartres,² were known for their wide learning and speculative energy. They viewed themselves primarily as *grammatici*, teachers explicating the texts of the ancient authors, a task which they viewed as a means to new and authentic knowledge, an invitation to genuine speculation and a potential source of insight into the divine plan. [On textual

¹ See Philippe Delhay, 'L'organisation scolaire au xii^e siècle,' *Traditio* 5 (1947): 211–68; M.F.B. Brocchieri, 'The Intellectual,' in Jacques Le Goff, ed., *Medieval Callings*, tr. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago, 1990), pp. 181–90.

² See Peter Dronke, 'New Approaches to the School of Chartres,' *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 6 (1969 [1971]): 117–40, a response to the essay of R.W. Southern, 'Humanism and the School of Chartres,' cited below in n. 4.

interpretation as a form of philosophic investigation, see chapters 2 (vii), 3, 14, and 17. —ed.] Their master-text was Plato's mythic cosmology, the *Timaeus*, in a fragmentary Latin translation accompanied by the commentary of Calcidius. All could be described as Platonists in their approach to interpretation, but they augment their Platonic sources with a growing awareness of Greek and Arab astronomy and medicine. Their commentaries mark a new stage in the engagement of medieval thinkers with classical antiquity, and they can claim a place also in the history of philosophy and natural science.

Bernard of Chartres (d. after 1124), the 'old man of Chartres' whose teachings assume a legendary authority in John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon* (1159), produced glosses on Plato's *Timaeus*, stressing the rational coherence of the natural world and its relation to the higher world of archetypal Ideas, which largely defined the interests of this group of scholar-teachers. **William of Conches** (c. 1085–1154), who was Bernard's student and probably taught at Chartres, produced commentaries on Boethius, Macrobius, and the *Timaeus*, as well as encyclopedic compilations of his own. The famous teacher **Thierry of Chartres** (d. after 1156), possibly the brother of Bernard, and Chancellor at Chartres in the 1140s, wrote important commentaries on the *opuscula theologica* of Boethius, and a highly original hexaemeral treatise which undertook to explain the work of the six days in the light of pagan cosmology and natural science. **Bernardus Silvestris** (c. 1100–1160), who taught at Tours, is best known for his *Cosmographia*, a *prosimetrum* on the creation of the universe and mankind. Dedicated to Thierry, the *Cosmographia* is both a brilliant distillation of, and a shrewd commentary on, the achievement of Thierry, William and Bernard.

The 'School of Chartres,' to which all of these thinkers can be directly or indirectly linked, was long regarded by modern scholars as a sort of beacon of humanism and innovative scholarship in the early twelfth century. This view was first set in perspective by M.-D. Chenu,³ who showed the many varied forms taken by the concern with man and nature in this period, then sharply questioned by R.W. Southern, for whom the alleged humanism and intellectual pioneer-

³ Chenu's essays on twelfth-century thought have been collected and augmented in *La théologie au douzième siècle* (Paris, 1957); a selection from this volume is available in English as *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, tr. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago, 1968).

ing of the School of Chartres were an example of pernicious historical myth-making.⁴ Southern has been answered by Peter Dronke and Nicholas Häring, who have reasserted in more specific terms the claims of Chartres as an intellectual and educational center.⁵

In the meantime the distinctive features of the thought of this group of scholars have been defined in a series of important essays by Edouard Jeauneau; their role in the development of medieval Platonism has been explored by Peter Dronke; Lauge Olaf Nielsen has assessed their impact on the development of theology; and Jon Whitman and the present writer have considered their contribution to imaginative literature.⁶ Monographs have appeared on William, Thierry, and Bernardus Silvestris,⁷ as well as a new history of twelfth-century philosophy.⁸ Finally, though much remains to be done, it is now possible to study major texts of all these authors in modern editions.⁹

The distinguishing feature of this school is their willingness to engage ancient texts directly and as nearly as possible on their own

⁴ 'Humanism and the School of Chartres,' in *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 61–85. Southern's views are further developed in 'The Schools of Paris and the School of Chartres,' in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable, with Carol D. Lanham (Cambridge, MA, 1982), pp. 113–37; *Platonism, Scholastic Method, and the School of Chartres* (pamphlet, Reading, 1979). For an example of the sort of claim Southern challenges, see Raymond Klibansky, 'The School of Chartres,' in *Twelfth-Century Europe and the Foundations of Modern Society*, ed. Marshall Clagett, Gaines Post and Robert Reynolds (Madison, WI, 1961), pp. 3–14.

⁵ Dronke, 'New Approaches to the School of Chartres'; Häring, 'Chartres and Paris Revisited,' in *Essays in Honor of Anton Charles Pegis*, ed. J.R. O'Donnell (Toronto, 1974), pp. 268–329.

⁶ Jeauneau, *Lectio philosophorum: Recherches sur l'Ecole de Chartres* (Amsterdam, 1973), contains all of his essays cited below; Dronke, *Fabula: Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism* (Leiden, 1974); Nielsen, *Theology and Philosophy in the Twelfth Century* (Leiden, 1982); Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century* (Princeton, 1972); Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Harvard, 1987).

⁷ Tullio Gregory, *Anima mundi: La filosofia di Guglielmo di Conches e la Scuola di Chartres* (Florence, 1955); Enzo Maccagnolo, *Rerum Universitas: Saggi sulla filosofia di Teodorico di Chartres* (Florence, 1976); Brian Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century: A Study of Bernard Silvester* (Princeton, 1972).

⁸ *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, ed. Peter Dronke (Cambridge, 1988).

⁹ In addition to the editions of Bernard, William, Thierry and Bernardus cited below, I would mention J.H. Waszink's edition of Calcidius, *Timaeus a Calcidio translatus commentarioque instructus* (2nd ed., London, 1975); and the editions by James Willis of Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis commentarii* (Leipzig, 1963), and Martianus Capella (Leipzig, 1983).

terms. The few biblical allusions in Bernard's *Glosae* set off the correspondence of Platonic with Christian ideas at the level of primary meaning,¹⁰ and where he reads the text allegorically, it is to demonstrate its inherent coherence, rather than to transpose its meaning into Christian terms.¹¹ The allegorical element in Plato's text—what Bernard and his followers refer to as a 'veil' or 'covering,' *involucrum* or *integumentum*—is a conscious recourse of the author, a way of preserving philosophical truth from misappropriation by the uncomprehending vulgar,¹² and a fundamental property of philosophical language, viewed in Platonic-Stoic terms. The meanings veiled by the mathematical formulae and mythic figures that express the workings of Plato's cosmos are profound, but they remain the products of human knowledge and imagination. The principles of interpretation implicit in Bernard's treatment of Plato's text are set forth in the commentaries of William of Conches,¹³ whose own commentaries greatly expand the scope of 'integumental' reading, and the same assumptions inform the writings of Thierry and Bernardus Silvestris.

But in every Platonism there is a grey area where mythic intuition assumes a quasi-spiritual authority, and twelfth-century Platonism is no exception: the insights of a Plato are circumscribed by the limitations of human thought, and must be qualified in the light of revelation, but they can also be validated by it, and then treated as virtually continuous with it. The most striking and controversial aspect of the exploitation of pagan wisdom in the work of William and Thierry is their treatment of the concept of the World Soul, which in the *Timaeus* informs the created universe and imbues it with an ordering intelligence. Treated as a natural principle by Bernard of

¹⁰ Bernard of Chartres, *Glosae super Platonem*, ed. Paul E. Dutton (Toronto, 1991), 6.252–55, p. 198, addressing the claim that virtue enables each soul to return after death to its 'native star' (*Timaeus* 42b), cites 2 Timothy 2:5; at 7.397–401, p. 215, explaining the task of philosophy, he cites Romans 1:20.

¹¹ See *Glosae*, Intro., p. 59, and 3.76–85, p. 148, on the idea that women are to be held in common (*Tim.* 18C).

¹² Fundamental for twelfth-century discussions of the *integumentum* are Macrobius' remarks on the philosophers' use of 'fables,' *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* 1.2. On the use of Macrobius by the theorist of the *integumentum*, William of Conches, see Jeauneau, 'Macrobie, source du platonisme chartrain,' *Studi medievali*, ser. 3, 1 (1960): 3–24 (repr. in *Lectio philosophorum*); Dronke, *Fabula*, pp. 13–55.

¹³ See Jeauneau, 'L'usage de la notion d'*integumentum* à travers les gloses de Guillaume de Conches,' *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*, hereafter *AHDLM*, 24 (1957): 35–100; repr. in *Lectio philosophorum*.

Chartres,¹⁴ in William's commentaries this *anima mundi* becomes at once the 'natural vitality' which informs all creative life, and a 'divine and benign concord' which he finds it appropriate to identify with the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ The same range of associations appears in Thierry's 'Treatise on the Work of the Six Days.' He first describes the virtually autonomous system of the elements, each informed by its seminal cause or *virtus*, acting together to sustain temporal life,¹⁶ before going on to consider the primal chaotic state in which they were informed by the power which Moses calls 'the spirit of the Lord,' and describes as 'moving over the waters'; this same spirit, in the Hermetic *Asclepius*, mediates between God and matter; it is the 'inner spirit' which Vergil describes as imparting life to the universe; Plato's World Soul; and the Holy Spirit of Christian belief.¹⁷ [On the World Soul and on the multiple dimensions of twelfth-century *integumenta*, see chapter 2 (vii) and the opening of chapter 14. —ed.]

An anonymous commentator on the *Timaeus*, clearly familiar with William's teaching, dwells on the implications of the World Soul:

The World Soul is that eternal love in the Creator through which he created all things and governs his creation harmoniously, by means of that harmony whose failure would mean the immediate dissolution of the structure of the universe. It is this love that theologians who adhere to the tenets of the Christian religion call the Holy Spirit—transferring the terms, as a certain thinker has observed, from the human sphere to the divine. For, says this thinker, just as we can tell by a man's breathing whether he is filled with joy or tormented by sorrow, so by observing this love one comes to a perception of the divine mind Those who assign to this spirit the epithet 'holy' do well, for he is the holiest of men who enables all others to become good through participation in his holiness.

Others define the World Soul thus: it is a natural vigor instilled in creatures This natural vigor is called the Holy Spirit by some teachers, and this view is in no respect at odds with that given above. Though the words are different, the sense is wholly the same. . . .

¹⁴ *Glosae super Platonem*, ed. Dutton, p. 173: "'he placed in the center a soul" [Tim. 34B], that is, a vital force to regulate created life.'

¹⁵ See Tullio Gregory, *Platonismo medievale: Studi e ricerche* (Rome, 1958), pp. 135–38; Whitman, *Allegory*, pp. 202–07.

¹⁶ *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* 17, ed. N.M. Häring, *Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres and His School* (Toronto, 1971), p. 562: 'God, creator of all, infused these powers and others which I call "seminal causes" into the elements . . . so that from these elemental powers order and regularity might proceed.'

¹⁷ *Tractatus* 27, pp. 566–67. Cp. *Asclepius* 14; *Aeneid* 6.724–26; *Timaeus* 34–37.

Some have said that Plato saw the world as a great living creature, whose soul, they said, is a vital heat emanating from the sun which is diffused through the whole universe and gives rise to all growth. Some declare that God established the universe as a kind of fundamental principle of all substantial existence, bodily and spiritual. For they say that all other bodies are derived from the world's body. Likewise they posit the World Soul as a sort of fountain of souls, imagining it as a great spirit diffused through the entire universe. They are not so bold as to declare that this 'spirit' is the Holy Spirit: they approach this truth but will not see it clearly, and in their willful ignorance fall back on Plato and Vergil, who speak about the World Soul in the manner of philosophers. . . .¹⁸

The strong syncretic impulse in this passage is potentially misleading. Like similar passages in William, it may not appear significantly different from the *testimonia philosophorum*, foreshadowings of Christian theology in pagan authors which writers of the patristic period compiled to attest the prevalent truth of Christianity. But something more is expressed by the reliance on the metaphor of 'breath' or 'spirit' as an interpretive tool, the persistent emphasis on the physical operation of the power described, and the assumption that twelfth-century hermeneutics can bring the spiritual intuitions of those ancients who spoke 'in the manner of philosophers' to full realization. Far from simply reformulating a traditional theme of Christian apologetic, this passage reflects the effort of Thierry and William to translate Platonic myth into scientific terms in order to articulate the ways in which the natural order is informed by divine purpose. Fundamental for William is the conviction that to study the natural world as an autonomous system is in no way to question God's authority.¹⁹ Repeatedly he extrapolates from the 'facts' of physical nature to the power that produced them, as when, having explained the creation of man in naturalistic terms, he declares that far from derogating God's power, such arguments enhance it, since the natural process expresses the divine will.²⁰ In the same spirit Thierry glosses the work of the six

¹⁸ Paris, B. N. lat. 8624, f. 17r, cited by Gregory, *Platonismo medievale*, pp. 126–28. As Gregory notes, the 'thinker' cited is surely William: cp. *De philosophia mundi* 1.9 (Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina, hereafter PL, 172.45), where William notes that 'spirit' is literally 'breathing,' 'but since in a man's "spirit" or breathing his will may be discerned, divinity has metaphorically been called "spirit."'

¹⁹ See Dorothy Elford, 'William of Conches,' in *Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, pp. 317–27.

²⁰ *Glosae super Platonem*, ed. Edouard Jeuneau (Paris, 1965), p. 122; cp. *De philosophia mundi* 1.23 (PL 172.56). See also Jeuneau, 'Note sur l'Ecole de Chartres,' *Studi medievali*, ser. 3, 5 (1964): 847–51.

days 'according to physical law' (*secundum physicam*), passing from the formative work of the elements to a perception of the divine *spiritus* that informs them. Elsewhere he speaks of matter, form, and spirit as a secondary trinity, 'perpetual powers' whose attributes are in effect *integralia* of the divine Persons.²¹

The distinctiveness of the thought of Thierry and William appears clearly when compared with apparently similar ideas in the theological writings of Peter Abelard. Abelard too was fascinated that Platonic thought could be seen as adumbrating Christian ideas, and in the *testimonia* provided by ancient Platonic sources he found support for his claims about the accessibility to reason of religious truth. But Abelard makes no systematic claim for Plato's authority in religious matters, and the diverse ways in which he characterizes the correspondences between Platonic and Christian thought leave the ontological status of Platonic intuition in doubt. At times he suggests that the gentile philosophers, like the Hebrew prophets, were vouchsafed a special revelation,²² or coyly cites Valerius Maximus' anecdote of the bees who smeared honey on the lips of the infant Plato to foretell his visionary powers.²³ Like William, he sees the World Soul as expressing the power of the Holy Spirit 'by a most beautiful veiling image' (*per pulcherrimam involucri figuram*),²⁴ and elsewhere he seems to impute to the *Timaeus* a prophetic power comparable to that of Scripture. Citing the circles of Same and Different within which Plato's World Soul comprehends the universe, and whose intersection forms an 'X' or 'Chi,' he asks whether one might see in this detail a prophecy of universal salvation through the Crucifixion.²⁵

²¹ Defining the Persons of the Trinity as aspects of divine Unity, Thierry declares: 'Unity inasmuch as it is unity creates matter; inasmuch as it is the equality of unity it creates forms; in that it is love and bonding, it creates spirit' (*Commentum super Boethii librum de Trinitate* 2.39, in *Commentaries on Boethius*, ed. Häring, pp. 80–81). See also Stephen Gersh, 'Platonism—Neoplatonism—Aristotelianism: A Twelfth-Century Metaphysical System and Its Sources,' in *Renaissance and Renewal*, pp. 517–20; Peter Dronke, 'Thierry of Chartres,' in *Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, pp. 379–85.

²² *Theologia 'scholarium'* 1.68; ed. E.M. Buytaert and C.J. Mews, *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis*, hereafter CCCM, 13 (Turnhout, 1973), p. 345; PL 178.998.

²³ *Theologia 'scholarium'* 1.184, p. 396; PL 178.1029. Cp. Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 1.6.3.

²⁴ *Theologia 'summi boni'* 1.38; ed. Buytaert and Mews, p. 99.

²⁵ *Theologia christiana* 2.16; ed. E.M. Buytaert, CCCM 12 (Turnhout, 1969), p. 140; cp. *Timaeus* 36BC. Abelard's suggestion is not wholly original; see Wilhelm Bousset, 'Platons Weltseele und das Kreuz Christi,' *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 14 (1913): 273–85.

Elsewhere he treats Plato as an unconscious prophet, comparing him to the Hebrew priest Caiaphas, who said of Jesus that it was good 'that this one man die for the people,' and thereby unwittingly proclaimed the redemptive significance of Jesus' death.²⁶ But whatever significance we assign to such instances, Abelard nowhere adopts the point of view of a scientist or cosmologist,²⁷ and his thinking in this area remains unsystematic. His approach to Platonic *involucra* seems at one moment to resemble William's, at another that of the biblical exegete. He flirts with the Platonic tradition, and puts specific passages from the *Timaeus* to specific uses in various of his writings, but it is never central to his thought.²⁸

William, too, often seems to hint at a certain analogy between his philosophical glossing and the practices of biblical exegesis, distinguishing the nuances of particular words, the literal meaning of the passage (*litera*), and the larger idea it adumbrates (*summa integumentum*), and noting the often incongruous relation between *verbum* and *sensus mysticus*. Rightly understood, every aspect of the language of the *Timaeus* or *Aeneid*, as of biblical texts, will yield figural meanings, be they the rudimentary gleanings of etymology and numerology or the archetypal patterns underlying cosmological metaphor. Frankly acknowledging himself a lover of Plato,²⁹ William can contrast the purely verbal concerns of Aristotle as he knew him to Plato's profound engagement with *res*, substantial reality,³⁰ imputing to the Platonic

²⁶ *Theologia 'scholarium'* 1.180, 191, pp. 394, 400; PL 178.1028, 1032; and John 11:49–52.

²⁷ Jean Jolivet, 'Éléments du concept de nature chez Abélard,' in *La filosofia della natura nel Medioevo: Atti del Terzo Congresso Internazionale di Filosofia Medievale, 1964* (Milan, 1966), pp. 297–304. See also Marcia Colish, *Peter Lombard* (2 vols., Leiden, 1994), Vol. 1, pp. 254–59.

²⁸ See Lawrence Moonan, 'Abelard's Use of the *Timaeus*,' *AHDLMA* 64 (1989): 1–90, who concludes that despite his admiration for the 'greatest of philosophers,' his true masters were Aristotle in method and the patristic authors in doctrine (p. 90).

²⁹ See William's *Glosae super Platonem*, ed. Jauneau, p. 211: 'Yet if one grasps not merely Plato's words but his meaning . . . one discovers, hidden by verbal coverings [*integumenta*], a most profound philosophy—which, out of love for Plato, let us now reveal.'

³⁰ See Maurice de Gandillac, 'Le platonisme au xii^e et au xiii^e siècles,' in *Association Guillaume Budé. Congrès de Tours et de Poitiers, 1953* (Paris, 1954), p. 273, citing Paris, B. N. lat. 6406, f. 9v. Cp. Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, ed. R. Bossuat (Paris, 1955), 1.131–34: 'Aristotle readies the logician's arms, and shows the rules of disputation. But Plato, more divinely gifted, dreams of the very mysteries of creation and deep designs of heaven, seeking to know the mind of God.'

text something like the mysterious pregnancy of Scripture. But his frame of reference is nothing more 'mystical' than the order of nature: he never considers the higher wisdom metaphorically adumbrated by the verbal text as diverging from the conscious intention of the author.³¹ Aware that his *auctores* were subject to error, he emphasizes that pagan wisdom is always subordinate in authority, that its highest function is to provide the naturalistic *quomodo*, the 'how' of events and phenomena whose 'why' remains the province of Scripture and the Fathers. [On the efforts of Moslems and Jews in the Middle Ages to engage ancient philosophy with their respective sacred texts, see chapters 2 (v–vi), 7–9, and 13. —ed.]

Thus William makes a very different claim for his *auctor* than Abelard, for whom Plato is now the *anima naturaliter christiana*, now the inspired gentile prophet. William's Plato remains first and last a human thinker exploring God's creation in the light of human reason and imagination. Thierry, seeking to bring to light the scientific content of Genesis, casts Moses himself in this role, explicitly eschewing allegory and treating the biblical text as a series of *integumenta* of elemental physics.³² Thus they renew the Platonic and Stoic interpretative traditions. Their incorporation of poetic myth into their speculative thought is not only true to the *Timaeus*,³³ but expresses a new confidence in human art and intelligence. At no time in the Middle Ages, perhaps, was ancient literature taken more seriously as a source of wisdom.

So viewed the work of these thinkers is an important element in the twelfth-century Renaissance. From another viewpoint theirs is a story of limited resources and failed ambitions. R.W. Southern has argued forcefully that their thought was old-fashioned, obsolescent even in its heyday, and that even their work with newly recovered

³¹ See the essay of Jeuneau cited above, n. 13. A commentator familiar with William's work distinguishes clearly, if simplistically, between *integumentum* and Scriptural *allegoria*: 'Allegory is a discourse which enfolds within a historical narrative a meaning that is true and different from what is said outwardly, as with the story of Jacob's wrestling. *Integumentum* encloses a true meaning within a fabulous narrative, such as the legend of Orpheus. Now both history and fable harbor a hidden, deeper meaning [*mysterium occultum*] . . . But allegory is proper to Scripture, *integumentum* to philosophy'; *The Commentary on Martianus Capella's 'De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii' Attributed to Bernardus Silvestris*, ed. H.J. Westra (Toronto, 1986), p. 45.

³² *Tractatus* 1, ed. Häring, p. 555.

³³ See Dronke, *Fabula*, pp. 1–11; Joseph Moreau, 'Opifex, id est Creator': Remarques sur le platonisme de Chartres,' *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 56 (1974): 48–49.

sources was dogged by the limitations of their 'scientific' knowledge.³⁴ The texts they studied raised philosophical issues without providing tools to explore these issues. Their methods and hermeneutical assumptions did not differ fundamentally from those of glossators and mythographers in the Carolingian tradition. 'All their thoughts,'³⁵ says Southern, 'were old thoughts,' and if their 'humanism' gave these thoughts a new lease on life, the knowledge necessary to sustain that life was recovered only by later generations. In the meantime it was only their ambitions that were new.

Southern is too quick to dismiss ambitions grounded in a sense of intellectual possibility that has no precedent in the Middle Ages. For all their resemblance to their Carolingian forebears, these scholars were doing something new. They engaged their chosen texts with a directness and a degree of objectivity that are themselves a remarkable achievement at this period, and their learning made them famous.³⁶ Much in their philosophical program is anticipated in the work of Johannes Scotus Eriugena, but they managed to largely distance themselves from the mystical neo-Platonism which makes it difficult to isolate the philosophical elements in Eriugena's thought.³⁷ As Southern himself acknowledges, their attempt to establish the Liberal Arts as essential to the pursuit of truth contributed significantly to the founding of a 'scientific' theology.³⁸

But the limitations imposed by a lack of access to the tools and methods of philosophy, as it would come to be pursued in the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries, were undeniably fundamental. When it came to bridging the gap between their newly particularized understanding of the physical world and their less certain sense of the metaphysical implications of its laws and patterns, Bernard and his followers relied heavily on what Jean Jolivet calls 'grammatical Platonism,'³⁹ exploiting the verbal arts to the fullest possible degree through mythography, etymology, and the other traditional ways of

³⁴ See Southern, 'Humanism and the School of Chartres,' pp. 61–85.

³⁵ 'Humanism and the School of Chartres,' p. 83.

³⁶ On Bernard of Chartres, see *Glosae super Platonem*, ed. Dutton, pp. 239–49. For Thierry, see Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, pp. 28–29; Dronke, 'Thierry of Chartres,' pp. 359–63. For William, see Gregory, *Anima mundi*, pp. 49–97.

³⁷ See Winthrop Wetherbee, 'Philosophy, Cosmology, and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance,' in *Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, pp. 29–33.

³⁸ Southern, *Medieval Humanism*, pp. 45–46.

³⁹ See Jean Jolivet, 'Quelques cas de "platonisme grammatical" du vii^e au xii^e siècle,' in *Mélanges offerts à René Crozet* (2 vols., Poitiers, 1966), Vol. 1, pp. 93–99.

extracting an inner and potentially transcendent meaning from their *auctores*. Their project was sustained by the conviction that the phenomenal world, the *ornatus elementorum* (articulation of the elements), as William and Bernardus Silvestris refer to it, is a tissue of figures and images which must be read like a literary text, that the philosophy of nature ‘involves and embodies a transcendent form of rhetoric.’⁴⁰ The ‘discovery of nature’ so crucial to the Burckhardian view of the twelfth-century Renaissance offered by Chenu and others,⁴¹ was first and last a rediscovery of texts about nature. As Brian Stock has argued, the validity of knowledge consisted in its congruence with ‘the inner logic of texts’; decoding the natural world was a matter of deciphering the *integumenta* of the *Timaeus*.⁴²

And this potentially liberating idea proved, in the practice of William and his fellow cosmologists, fatally circumscriptive, for it is here that the limitations of their resources become most plain. Even in their most ambitious speculations they remained, perhaps more than they realized, grammarians. They differ from the grammarians and encyclopedists of late antiquity, Servius, Macrobius, Calcidius, and Fulgentius—for all of whom it was axiomatic that the great *auctores* were repositories of profound philosophical wisdom—in their respect for authorial intention as they understand it, and they never reduce the commentator’s task to a mere occasion for the display of encyclopedic learning, but their thought is in its basic character a version of traditional literary criticism. The true roots of their attempt to ground religious thought in a philosophical understanding of nature and the Liberal Arts are in the ancient tradition of commentary on Homer and Vergil, the neo-Platonic and Stoic tradition which treats the great poet as an omniscient sage, and discovers a coherent philosophy in his etymologically and metaphorically pregnant language. [On this tendency in ancient interpretation, compare chapter 3. On its development in late medieval and Renaissance mythography, see chapters 12 (ii) and 14. —ed.]

In this tradition the great poem is a vessel for whatever knowledge the critic seeks in it.⁴³ Homer is a Platonist, a Pythagorean or

⁴⁰ Joan Cadden, ‘Science and Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: The Natural Philosophy of William of Conches,’ *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995): 10.

⁴¹ See Chenu, *La théologie au douzième siècle*, pp. 19–51.

⁴² *The Implications of Literacy* (Princeton, 1983), pp. 317–20.

⁴³ The best account of this critical tradition is Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian* (Berkeley, 1986).

a Stoic. Vergil for his late-antique acolytes is always a neo-Platonist, and his poetry acquires the status of a sort of cultural shrine. Augustine complains memorably of the mystique that surrounds the activity of the grammarian, whose power and privilege it is to draw back the veil of verbal meaning that conceals the inner sanctum of Vergil's meaning from the eyes of the profane.⁴⁴ The renowned fourth-century grammarian Servius interrupts his line-by-line glossing of the text of Vergil's *Aeneid* to expand on the philosophical aspects of the sixth book of the poem, which includes not only Aeneas' journey to the realm of the dead, but a vision of Elysium centered on the discourse of Anchises, who proclaims the vital force that sustains universal life, and the myth of the renewed existence and religious evolution of the soul.⁴⁵ Phrases from Anchises' discourse appear again and again in twelfth-century writings where they serve, as in the passage from Thierry's *Tractatus* discussed above, to enhance the authority of Plato's conception of the World Soul.

An extremely influential compendium of the Liberal Arts, the *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* of the fifth-century grammarian Martianus Capella, begins with a strange and elaborate allegorical account of the marriage to which his work owes its title, providing a counterpart to the traditional lofty view of the function of literature in the form of an original mythic narrative. The *De nuptiis* describes the quest of Mercury, or eloquence, for a bride; the election of Philology, or earthly knowledge, as his mate; and Philology's preparation for marriage through an initiation into divine wisdom. 'Marriage' is understood throughout as encompassing the interaction of the principles of cosmic order, as well as the correspondences between the paradigms and symbolic languages of earthly knowledge and the universal principles and harmonies they seek to express. In the course of the story a broad range of classical deities are encountered and described in terms of their various attributes and cosmic functions. The lengthy process by which Philology is enabled to rise to a knowledge of the causes of things, and ultimately to a visionary awareness of 'that truth which exists by virtue of powers beyond existence,'⁴⁶ is made the occasion for a thorough review of the organization of knowledge and its relation to the order of the universe.

⁴⁴ *Confessiones* 1.13.20–22.

⁴⁵ Servius, *In Aen. VI, Praef.*; see also *In Aen. VI*, 404, 724, 730–48.

⁴⁶ *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* 2.203–206. See also Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, pp. 83–92; Whitman, *Allegory*, pp. 99–105.

In Martianus' allegory the tendencies of the Latin critical tradition are carried to their logical conclusion. The idea of great poetry has, so to speak, been turned inside out, so that literal narrative is nothing more or less than a dramatization of allegorical meaning. The theme of human life as mental or spiritual journey—the 'latent' content of Vergil and Homer as read by their ancient critics—has surfaced to become the explicit theme of Martianus' fable, wholly displacing the traditional heroic legend. Cosmology, mythology and religious mystery are precisely what Martianus' narrative is 'about,' and they are precisely correlated; the systematizing work of the neo-Platonizing reader has already been done. The fable embodies a mythographic reading of itself, as if it had been constructed out of a preexisting commentary.

In adapting to their purpose the idealizing conception of the literary text that they had inherited from the grammarians, the twelfth-century scholars substituted Plato's mythic cosmology for the Pythagorean and neo-Platonist myth of the soul as their central archetype, and their emphasis is more overtly scientific than that of Porphyry, Servius, or Martianus Capella, but the influence of these models is finally determinative. Bernard and his followers possessed only a vague understanding of the pedagogical purposes and the at times almost ceremonial function that such criticism had been intended to serve in late antiquity. Lacking much of the knowledge that would have enabled them to isolate the genuinely scientific content of their sources, they applied to mathematical formulae and the data of astronomy many of the same techniques that served to decode the neo-Platonizing confections of Martianus.

The essentially literary character of twelfth-century cosmologizing appears plainly in the work of the most original of these thinkers, Thierry, all of whose writings bespeak the impulse to discover continuity between natural and divine creation. Creation for Thierry is the 'unfolding' of a plan which first exists 'enfolded' (*complicata*) in the simplicity of God. This orderly unfolding or 'necessary continuity' brings to bear on matter 'the truths of forms and images, which we call "ideas,"' mediating between form as it exists in the Divine Mind (the 'form of forms') and the image of the ideal embodied in created things.⁴⁷ [On 'complication' and 'explication' in the cosmos

⁴⁷ See *Glosa super Boethii librum de Trinitate* 2.16–22; ed. Häring, pp. 272–73. See also Dronke, 'Thierry of Chartres,' pp. 368–70.

and in *logos*, see chapter 2 (vii) and the conclusion of chapter 3.—ed.] The mediating movement, Thierry notes, is called by many names: natural law, nature, world soul, natural justice, *eimarmene*,⁴⁸ fate or the fates, divine intelligence—a litany which, like his discussion of the ‘spirit’ of cosmic life, cited above, invokes the diverse array of texts whose intuitions he seeks to reconcile with Christian theology.⁴⁹ The process, moreover, closely parallels the creativity of the human mind, itself a formative principle (*forma artificialium specierum*) which projects images onto the material world.⁵⁰ Similarly, the work of the elements, in which fire, ‘the artist and efficient cause,’ transforms subject earth, while air and water mediate and synthesize its effects, imitates the ‘artist’ Spirit of Genesis 1:2.⁵¹

It is in such analogies and allusions that the real continuity of Thierry’s vision of the order of things resides. As Dronke sympathetically observes, his essays in physics and mathematics often seem ‘metaphors projected by the soul in its effort at understanding,’ rather than attempts to give objective definition to natural law.⁵² Thierry’s hierarchy of forms and his strong concern to describe creation as a coherent process recall an important feature of the thought of Bernard of Chartres, who, recognizing the need for some intermediary between Plato’s eternal ideas or pure forms and the material world, had posited a secondary rank of ‘natural’ or ‘innate’ forms (*formae natae*) capable of union with matter.⁵³ By emphasizing the active, causal role of these forms in the production of creatures, Bernard provided

⁴⁸ In the Hermetic *Asclepius*, c. 19, the term *eimarmene* denotes the operation of natural law.

⁴⁹ Cp. the corresponding array of names for matter (2.18, p. 272), which includes the mythographic ‘underworld’ (*infernum*), as well as Calcidius’ *hyle* or *silva* (‘wood,’ i.e., raw material), ‘chaos,’ ‘aptitude’ and ‘lack’ (*caementia*).

⁵⁰ *Glosa* 2.32–34, pp. 275–76. The passage begins: ‘If one considers how the mind is naturally generative and conceptive of forms and ideas, one will understand how God is form. . . .’ Elsewhere Thierry uses the familiar image of the architect to describe the action of the divine mind (*Commentum super Ebdomadas Boetii* 27, p. 410).

⁵¹ *Tractatus* 17, 25, pp. 562, 566.

⁵² ‘Thierry of Chartres,’ p. 371.

⁵³ See Marie-Thérèse d’Alverny, *Alain de Lille: Textes inédits* (Paris, 1965), pp. 166–69; Gersh, ‘Platonism—Neoplatonism—Aristotelianism,’ pp. 518–22; and Bernard, *Glosae*, ed. Dutton, pp. 70–96. As Dutton notes, Calcidius and Boethius had posited such intermediaries, but whereas Calcidius sought merely to distinguish among levels of existence within a largely static system, and Boethius to emphasize the radically transcendent character of the true Ideas, Bernard’s contribution is to have focused on the active role of his ‘native forms’ in the creative process.

the dynamic principle that he found lacking in the *Timaeus* itself, capable of bridging the gap between the physical and metaphysical worlds. But whereas Bernard develops the implications of this concept only as they apply to his reading of the *Timaeus*, in Thierry's more original project the intuition of such continuities draws him repeatedly into an essentially poetic mode of thinking in which the work of the elements and the acts of the human mind are at once effects of all-informing Spirit and *integumenta* for its workings, interpretative gestures which are confirmed repeatedly by the marshalling of the authority of ancient poetry, philosophy and mythography.

It is thus highly appropriate that Bernardus Silvestris, the last representative of the 'School of Chartres,' was primarily a poet. His *Cosmographia*, in effect a new *Timaeus*, consists of two books: the first, *Megacosmus*, is an account of the creation of the universe by Noys or Providence, and its animation by Endeuchia, the cosmic soul; *Microcosmus*, the second, depicts the creation of man, the lesser universe, by Urania (celestial reason), Physis (the governing principle of physical life), and Nature. The *Cosmographia* closes the circle that circumscribes the thought of Bernardus' cosmologizing predecessors; it gives brilliant expression to their essential intuitions, but does so, like Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis*, by reencoding them in a new cosmic myth which is a highly self-conscious literary exercise.⁵⁴ Bernardus' account of the ordering of the elements is equally an exercise in rhetorical ordering, charged with word-play and full of images of the disciplining of an unruly 'subject matter' whose chaotic fecundity has been well characterized as a figure for the productive capacities of poetic language.⁵⁵ [On the order of creation and the order of composition in the *Cosmographia* and the later twelfth-century work of Alan of Lille, see chapter 2 (vii). —ed.]

At the same time Bernardus' narrative expresses powerfully a desire like Thierry's to describe creation in coherent terms. Nature herself is the initial catalyst for the cosmogony: the poem begins with her

⁵⁴ On the interplay of creative and interpretative allegory in the *Cosmographia* see Whitman, *Allegory*, pp. 220–29.

⁵⁵ Linda Lomperis, 'From God's Book to the Play of the Text in the *Cosmographia*,' *Medievalia et Humanistica* 16 (1988): 51–71. Bernardus is in fact the model for Geoffrey of Vinsauf's account of the imposition of order on one's literary subject matter; see *Poetria nova* 44–49, 60–61, 136–41, 214–18; ed. Edmond Faral, *Les arts poétiques du xii^e et du xiii^e siècle* (Paris, 1923), pp. 198–99, 201, 203.

impassioned appeal to Noys on behalf of Silva, primal matter, who 'yearns for the shaping influence of number and the bonds of harmony.'⁵⁶ What Thierry, referring to matter, called 'absolute possibility' here becomes as nearly as possible an active power.⁵⁷ In the narrative which follows, chapters in verse alternate with chapters whose prose, largely confected from echoes of Boethius, Calcidius, Macrobius, Martianus, and the *Asclepius*, serves, like Thierry's musterings of ancient authorities, to suggest allusively the syncretist character of Bernardus' project. The *dramatis personae* of his allegory, too, are syntheses of ideas drawn from many sources, and their roles and the interaction among them attest to the ambitious and precarious character of twelfth-century cosmological speculation. His Noys and Endelechia correspond to the Exemplar and World Soul of the *Timaeus*, and both are in some sense theophanies: Noys is said to partake of the nature and substance of God, and Endelechia issues from Noys 'by a sort of emanation,' like the biblical Wisdom.⁵⁸ Yet neither can be identified with God. The Trinity is clearly and separately described in the *Cosmographia*, and Noys and Endelechia seem to be secondary manifestations of divine power, or representations of that power as it bears on the order of nature. Bernardus' conception of primal matter, Silva or Hyle, is similarly ambiguous. He speaks at one moment of an inherent 'malignity' in matter, an intractability to form which is an ineradicable threat to the stability of cosmic life; but this view coexists with one in which Silva is informed by aspirations which seem at times to transcend the Aristotelian yearning of matter for form, and recall both Thierry's treatment of elemental life as mimetic of divine creativity, and the emanationist treatment of matter in the neo-Platonic system of Eriugena.⁵⁹

But while Bernardus' allegory is clearly conditioned by his deep imaginative sympathy with his predecessors, there is also a strong skeptical element in the *Cosmographia*, a recurring anxiety about the capacity of human understanding to attain by its own powers to an understanding of the nature of things, which amounts to a questioning

⁵⁶ *Cosmographia* 1.1.22; ed. Peter Dronke, *Cosmographia* (Leiden, 1978), p. 97; tr. Winthrop Wetherbee, *The 'Cosmographia' of Bernardus Silvestris* (New York, 1973), p. 67.

⁵⁷ See Thierry, *Lectiones in Boethii librum de Trinitate* 2.10–21, pp. 157–61; Whitman, *Allegory*, p. 188.

⁵⁸ *Cosmographia* 1.2.13; ed. Dronke, p. 102; tr. Wetherbee, p. 74. See Wisdom 7:25.

⁵⁹ See Wetherbee, tr., *The 'Cosmographia' of Bernardus Silvestris*, pp. 36–38.

of the adequacy of those very intellectual resources whose rich suggestiveness Bernardus exploits so effectively in his allegory. *Microcosmus*, in describing the creation of man, is simultaneously exploring the capacities of human understanding, its ability to comprehend the universe and the place of humankind within it. Human nature is a synthesis of the higher knowledge instilled in it by Urania—the principles of celestial order and harmony, and a Platonic intuition of its own divine origins—and a physical constitution crafted by Physis which enables humankind to live in a functional and productive relation to its natural environment. The two are brought together by Nature, whose ability to effect the required synthesis thus becomes a sort of anticipatory figure for the capacities of human nature itself. And it is noteworthy that the task is accomplished only with great difficulty, for it compels Physis to emulate the powers of Noys herself by forming the unruly elements into a vessel worthy of receiving Urania, and requires that Urania herself overcome her inherent antipathy to the material world. The implied difficulty really expresses an incompatibility between modes of thought. Urania is a Platonist, and her true sphere is that of theology. Physis, on the other hand, has mastered the Aristotelian categories, and her powers are empirical and analytical. In preparation for their collaboration in the creation of man, Urania is endowed by Noys with the ‘Mirror of Providence,’ in which may be beheld ‘the eternal mind,’ and the immortal exemplars of all things. Physis is granted only the ‘Book of Memory,’ the record of human scrutiny of the laws of the physical world, a study based ‘often on fact, but more often on probable conjecture.’ Nature’s tool is the ‘Table of Fate,’ the order manifested in history and in the ongoing life of the greater universe.⁶⁰ The three compendia bear essentially the same relation among themselves as do the spheres of theology, mathematics and physics as defined by Thierry: theology considers the divine simplicity which ‘enfolds’ the ideas of all things; mathematics traces their orderly unfolding; and physics deals with the realm of possibility, the elements and material creation.⁶¹ But in Bernardus’ poem the continuity among them

⁶⁰ *Cosmographia* 2.11; ed. Dronke, pp. 142–44; tr. Wetherbee, pp. 114–17. On the implications of this motif, see Dronke, *Fabula*, pp. 122–26.

⁶¹ See Thierry, *Lectiones* 2.1–32, pp. 154–65. A gloss in Oxford Bodleian Laud Misc. 515, which preserves the best text of the *Cosmographia*, similarly identifies Noys’ three gifts with theology, astronomy and physics.

is far more tentative and uncertain. In effect *Urania* and *Physis* are as the Platonism and physical science of Bernardus' own day, the one in the process of being reclaimed by religious thought, the other being transformed and specialized by an influx of new knowledge and methodology. Far from providing in themselves the basis for an intellectual synthesis, both are being drawn into finite roles within the increasingly separate realms of philosophy and theology, in an intellectual universe whose dimensions the twelfth-century cosmologists could hardly have fathomed.

* * *

The cosmologists bequeathed a certain amount of conventional scientific lore to encyclopedists like Vincent of Beauvais, but their influence on philosophic thought was limited and short-lived. Indeed most of the evidence is negative. Certain of their ideas were seen as posing a threat to traditional orthodoxy. A short treatise *de erroribus Guillelmi de Conchis* survives under the name of William of Saint-Thierry,⁶² and may help to account for the fact that William's later writings deal cautiously with the relations of the World Soul and the Christian Trinity.⁶³ Like the censure of Abelard and Gilbert de la Porrée, such criticism seems to reflect an anxiety about the proliferation of intellectual activity outside the confines of traditional monastic culture.

In general, the ideas of the cosmologists were less often rebuked than simply ignored. Expositors of the Book of Genesis tend to adopt an uncompromising literalness that allows no scope to *integumenta*, and Platonic cosmological thinking is of scant importance to their project. Even Abelard in his *Hexaemeron* cites from the *Timaeus* only a passage affirming God's absolute authority over nature.⁶⁴ Early in the century Rupert of Deutz had borrowed certain details of his account of creation from pagan sources, but mentioned the *Platonici* (i.e., ancient authors in the Platonic tradition) only to refute them on such matters as the supposed eternity of matter, or the notion that 'ideas' or 'forms,' rather than God's own wisdom, could have

⁶² PL 180.333–40.

⁶³ See, for example, *Glosae super Platonem*, ed. Jeauneau, p. 145: 'Some say that this spirit is the Holy Spirit, which we neither affirm nor deny.' On the evolution of William's views, see Gregory, *Anima mundi*, pp. 154–74.

⁶⁴ *Expositio in Hexaemeron: in Gen.* 1:6–7; PL 178.747; cp. *Timaeus* 41B.

provided the exemplar of the created world.⁶⁵ This position soon assumed canonical form: both Peter Lombard in his *Sentences* and Peter Comestor in the *Historia scholastica* note brusquely that Moses' use of the verb *creavit* in the opening verse of Genesis reserves the creative act wholly to God, and is sufficient in itself to refute Plato's notion of creation as a collaboration among God, forms, and matter.⁶⁶

The effect of all this is to render the cosmologists' contribution to religious knowledge null and void.⁶⁷ But their influence in other areas was considerably longer-lasting. Their formative influence on the study of classical texts throughout the later Middle Ages is strikingly plain in the commentaries and compendia of Boccaccio (whose transcription of Bernardus' *Cosmographia* survives), and is still perceptible in the later Florentine humanists. We can see it as well in law and political theory, where the idea of Nature, the World Soul in its role as sustainer and regulator of cosmic life, comes increasingly to be viewed as providing a normative basis for ethical and social order.⁶⁷ Most important, they inspired new essays in poetic mythmaking; it is in no small part to their example that we owe the *Roman de la Rose*, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the *Divina Commedia* itself.

⁶⁵ In *Genesim* 1.1 (i.e., *De Trinitate et operibus eius* 1.1); ed. Rhabanus Haacke, CCCM 21 (Turnhout, 1971), p. 129; PL 167.200–201; see also John Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 82–86.

⁶⁶ Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* 2.1; PL 192.651; Peter Comestor, *Historia scholastica: Historia Libri Genesis* 1; PL 198.1055. See also Colish, *Peter Lombard*, Vol. 1, pp. 303–42; Ermenegildo Bertola, 'La doctrina della creazione nel *Liber Sententiarum* di Pier Lombardo,' *Pier Lombardo* 1 (1957): 27–44; and for further anti-Platonic views of the creation, Dronke, 'New Approaches to the School of Chartres,' 137–38.

⁶⁷ The emergence of the idea of nature in the context of twelfth-century speculation about the World Soul is traced by Gregory, *Platonismo medievale*, pp. 122–50; see also Wetherbee, 'Philosophy, Cosmology, and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance,' pp. 48–52.

**QUADRUPLEX SENSUS, MULTIPLEX MODUS:
SCRIPTURAL SENSE AND MODE IN
MEDIÉVAL SCHOLASTIC EXEGESIS**

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The history of modern scholarship on medieval Christian exegesis has featured as one of its central concerns the rival claims of the so-called 'literal' or 'historical' sense of Scripture and those 'allegorical', 'spiritual' or 'mystical' senses which lay hidden under the surface meaning of the sacred text. Henri de Lubac's magisterial *Exégèse médiévale* had a tendency to emphasise the continuity and continued importance of allegorical exegesis and to undervalue the cultural significance of the *sensus literalis*.¹ In marked contrast, the research of Beryl Smalley presented the literal sense as having, as it were, won out in the historical process.² According to Smalley's 'grand narrative' the *sensus literalis* came to attain a status which placed it above that enjoyed by the other senses, which were categorised within the hermeneutic hierarchy as being useful in preaching and private meditation but not at the level of speculative theology, wherein literalism and logic-chopping (after Aristotle) went hand-in-hand. In the preface to the third edition of her *Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, however, she expressed regret at not having paid sufficient attention to the Bible-study which had taken place within monastic communities (having concentrated her attention on the friars and secular masters, particularly those trained at the thirteenth-century University of Paris). And she certainly had a blind-spot concerning Joachim of Fiore, whose apocalypticism had major implications for allegorical/

¹ H. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, 2 pts. in 4 vols. (Paris, 1959–64).

² Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1984). For scholarly developments after Smalley, see particularly Katherine Walsh and Diana Wood, eds., *The Bible in the Medieval World. Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley* (Oxford, 1985), and the collection edited by Robert Lerner, *Neue Richtungen in der hoch- und spätmittelalterlichen Biblexegese*, Schriften des Historischen Kollegs Kolloquien 32 (Munich, 1996).

prophetic interpretation of the Bible. [On problems with the argument that by the late Middle Ages the interpretation of Christian Scripture increasingly stresses the 'literal' sense, see chapters 1 (ii–iii), 2 (viii), and 12 (conclusion). —ed.]

My own current position is that, in the history of ideas which cluster around the notion of the *sensus litteralis*, Smalley's controversial heading 'The Spiritual Exposition in Decline' still retains much of its force. However, the situation should not be seen as a simple conflict between literal and spiritual sense; we are dealing not with devaluation but rather with re-valuation, as certain values (often markedly different from those current in previous medieval centuries) came to be associated with the several *sensūs Scripturae*. And, quite crucially, as the parameters of the various senses themselves shifted. In order to substantiate that view I intend to identify some of the crucial discourses that constituted exegetical theory in the later Middle Ages, and show that sometimes they interrelated with, and sometimes conflicted with, each other. By 'discourses' I do not mean the discrete utterances of alleged individuals but rather systems of language-use, with characterising vocabularies and idioms, which function antagonistically, defining themselves in relation to other discourses.³ The antagonism between the discourse relating to the literal sense and that relating to the allegorical senses is very obvious; less evident perhaps is the antagonism between the discourse of *sensus* and the discourse of *modus procedendi/tractandi/agendi* (i.e. the method of didactic and stylistic procedure used in a given passage or book of the Bible). These antagonisms (among others) existed—and were accommodated, brought together on the contested yet encompassing and controlling site of scholastic hermeneutics.

First, a few words on the *quadruplex sensus* of Scripture. This went back a long way; for the purposes of the present paper, however, it will suffice to start with the *Summa theologiae* of St Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–74).⁴ God is the sole *auctor* of things, declares Aquinas, and

³ As will soon become evident, the present paper is very much a product of the 1990s in that it has been influenced by discourse-theory of the kind which has been especially indebted to the thought of Foucault (as interpreted and adapted by his acolytes) and, more broadly, by the priorities and methodology of cultural studies, whereby a text is read as a product of its cultural context and culture itself is read as text.

⁴ *Summa theologiae*, 1a, q. 1, a. 10; trans. A.J. Minnis and A.B. Scott with David Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100–c. 1375: The Commentary-Tradition*, rev. ed. (Oxford, 1991), pp. 241–3. The 'angelic doctor' entered the Dominican

therefore he can use things to signify.⁵ By contrast, human authors are *auctores* of words and use words to signify. When things are used significatively in Scripture, allegorical senses arise; when words are used significatively, we have the literal sense. Aquinas also discusses the number of spiritual senses, pronouncing in favour of three: the allegorical sense, 'whereby those things which are of the Old Law signify the things of the New Law'; the tropological or moral sense, 'whereby those things which are done in the person of Christ or those things which prefigure Christ are guides to what we ought to be doing'; and the anagogical sense, in so far as those same things 'signify what lies ahead in eternal glory'.⁶ This account draws on long-established hermeneutic traditions; in particular, Aquinas's distinction between significative things and significative words echoes St Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*.⁷ In the age of Aquinas, however, another analytic model became widely used which had a quite different, and rather more mixed, pedigree. The *Summa theologiae* attributed to Alexander of Hales (actually completed by Alexander's pupils after his death in 1245)⁸ includes a seminal account of the *multiplex modus* of theology, here defined in contrast with the mode characteristic of human science, which proceeds 'by definition, analysis, and deduction'.⁹ 'There are two methods of achieving knowledge', we are assured, 'one which operates through the understanding of the truth by human reason', as in human science, and another which 'operates through the inculcation of a pious disposition (*affectus pietatis*) by means of divine instruction', as is found pre-eminently in the Bible. The former educates the intellect, but the latter moulds the human affections. It seeks to move rather than logically prove, and proceeds

Order of Friars in 1244, becoming Master of Theology at the University of Paris in 1256; subsequently he taught in Paris and Italy, and died in 1274, his *Summa theologiae* having been left uncompleted after a spiritual experience which made all that he had written seem like straw. The Dominican Order officially adopted his teaching in 1278, and he was canonised in 1323.

⁵ Cf. A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot, 1988), p. 73.

⁶ Minnis and Scott, p. 242.

⁷ See *De Doctrina Christiana*, i.2; ii.1; ii.10; etc.

⁸ Alexander studied arts and theology at Paris, and became a doctor of theology c. 1220–1. In 1236 he joined the Order of Friars Minor, and he is regarded as the founder of the Franciscan school of theology.

⁹ Tractatus introductorius qu. 1 de doctrina theologiae, ch. 4, art. 1; trans. Minnis and Scott, p. 214.

by way of precept, example, exhortation, revelation, and prayer, because these modes are appropriate to a pious disposition. This is the mode of Holy Scripture Furthermore, the mode which uses precept is found in the Law and the Gospels, the mode using example is found in the historical books, the mode using exhortation is found in the books of Solomon and in the Epistles, the mode of revelation in the Prophets, and the orative mode [or, that using prayer] in the Psalms.¹⁰

The principles behind many items on this list—which was amplified and refined by Alexander’s successors—are well expressed in standard explanations of the strategies of oratory. Thus, the bases for the narrative, orative and exemplary modes may be found in those two major rhetorical textbooks of the Middle Ages, the *De Inventione* of Cicero and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.¹¹ Other modes may owe something to the discourses of the ‘introductions to grammatical authors’ (*accessūs ad auctores*), which merged rhetorical ideas with terms and techniques from commentary on the classical poets and other secular writers as studied in medieval grammar schools.¹² But of course, traditional rhetoric and poetics could not provide a vocabulary copious enough to accommodate all the problems of description and classification posed by divinely-inspired texts; hence the inclusion of the ‘revelatory mode’, which was found both within the Old Testament (in the writings of the major and minor prophets) and within the New Testament (in the Apocalypse).

All this having been said, it must be acknowledged that the dominant influence on the jargon of the *multiplex modus* was rhetorical. One of rhetoric’s most fundamental concerns is, of course, with the impact of language on an audience, and this was precisely what the *Summa Alexandri* identified as the objective of the *multiplex modus* of divine science. [On ‘modes’ and textures of Christian Scripture and the attention to reader response, see chapter 2 (viii). —ed.] By contrast, the *quadruplex sensus* was first and foremost a hermeneutic discourse, irrevocably driven by the needs of textual analysis and explanation. Yet the different elements which constituted that discourse were themselves derived from quite different sources and could

¹⁰ Trans. based on Minnis and Scott, p. 214.

¹¹ Cf. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, p. 125, and compare Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, iv.4, where the devices of eloquence are appropriated for Christian teaching.

¹² For an introduction to the *accessus* see Minnis and Scott, pp. 12–36.

implicate potentially or actually conflicting ideologies, as I hope to illustrate through a reading of part of the *Breviloquium* which the great Franciscan theologian, St Bonaventure, wrote in the period 1254–7.¹³ Behind the eloquent and elegant surface of his discussion of ‘The depth of Holy Scripture’¹⁴ lie several fissures which, if they are subjected to close analysis, seem to subvert the fundamental argument of this passage; namely, that there is something for everyone in holy Scripture, and this is guaranteed by the existence of four *sensūs Scripturae*. It will emerge that Bonaventure’s method of professing the wide audience-appeal of Scripture involves the segregation of *sensus* and *modus*.

Descendamus ad litteram. Having defined the four senses, which give depth to holy Scripture, Bonaventure affirms that it is appropriate that Scripture should have a threefold sense over and above the literal, referring respectively to the Bible’s subject-matter, hearer or pupil, origin, and end. Under the first of these headings it is explained that ‘belief as such gives forth its light in different ways according to the different states of believers’. Hence there are manifold meanings in one and the same passage. Moving on to discuss the hearer of Scripture, Bonaventure explains that no one is a fitting auditor ‘unless he is humble, pure, faithful, and attentive’. So, under ‘the shell of the obvious literal meaning are hidden mystical and profound understandings’; ‘the profound truths hidden within the humble letter of the text may abash the arrogant, keep out the unclean, drive away the deceitful, and arouse the idle to an understanding of the mysteries’. Bonaventure then rises to an enthusiastic affirmation of the universal appeal and availability of the divine Word:

And, because the recipients of this teaching do not belong to any one class (*genus*) of people, but come from all classes—for all who are to be saved must know something of this teaching—Scripture has a manifold meaning so that it may win over every mind, reach the level of every mind, rise above every mind, and illuminate and fire with its many rays of light every mind which diligently searches for it.

But Bonaventure has invoked a particular discourse which sits rather uneasily with these sentiments. This is the language of worthless shell

¹³ St Bonaventure (c. 1217–74) studied arts and subsequently theology at the University of Paris (he was a pupil of Alexander of Hales), and became Master General of the Franciscan Order in 1257.

¹⁴ *Breviloquium*, Prologus, 4; trans. Minnis and Scott, pp. 233–5.

and wondrous kernel. Of the ignorant and lewd being left with the mere husks of the letter while the *cognoscenti* enjoy the exclusive pleasures of mysteries which lie deep within, recoverable only by their expert exegesis. The 'humble letter of the text' functions as a protective carapace which serves to 'keep out the unclean' and 'drive away the deceitful'. In other words, pearls must not be cast before swine; those uncomprehending creatures may be left to gnaw on the husks. Such a discourse, with all the élitist associations that it implicates, hardly inspires confidence in the 'all classes welcome' protestation which we have just quoted. Does not the 'humble reader' belong with the 'humble letter', on the outside of the mysteries rather than within their profundities?

However, the sheer force of Bonaventure's writing keeps those subversive implications quite muted; he manages to skirt the problem without serious incident, so to speak. And a few lines later, in discussing the manifold *sensūs* of Scripture, the imagery of humility reappears, this time with reference to the humanity of Christ. Christ was humble insofar as he took on humanity in his incarnation, but elevated in His divine nature.

So, it was fitting that both He and His teaching should be humble in word and profound in meaning so that, just as Christ was wrapped in rags, so the wisdom of God in the Scriptures should be wrapped in humble images.

Here 'humility' is, I believe, convincingly sanctioned: introducing the humble humanity of Christ is a highly effective means of empowering the concept as it functions within this entire passage. True, the 'rags' are tacitly being placed on the same plane as that textual 'shell', but now it is easier to think of how simplicity is enmeshed with spirituality, of how the poor in spirit will possess the kingdom of heaven. However, another subverting discourse has crept in—or rather reappeared, for it was very much present in the earlier comment (as quoted above) that Scripture may 'illuminate and fire with its many rays of light every mind which diligently searches for it'. I refer to the Pseudo-Dionysian idiom of the wisdom of God being 'wrapped in humble images' in Scripture. At work here is the notion that 'the divine, supreme ray cannot shine down to us in this life unless it has been veiled with various coverings consisting of sensible forms'. Thus God in His wisdom ordered things so that we 'may be led back to the contemplation of the supernal virtues' by holy Scripture, which uses 'various material figures and figurative com-

positions', consisting 'in sensible forms'.¹⁵ Here I quote from *The Celestial Hierarchy*, a text which is, as is well known, imbued with Neoplatonic intellectual élitism, whereby those 'material figures and figurative compositions' (Bonaventure's 'humble images' or 'rags') are ultimately left behind, utterly rejected as the soul travels upward, far away from the contagion of mortal things, to achieve union with God. Indeed, some readers of Pseudo-Dionysius came dangerously close to marginalising the incarnation and humanity of Christ, as they concentrated on the individual returns of souls to their heavenly origin and objective, a process which (at least as far as the ultimate sources of such doctrine were concerned) had no obvious role for Christ's material intervention. In short, there is something rather paradoxical in Bonaventure's use of Pseudo-Dionysian theology in a context which emphasises the 'incarnational' model of symbolism, Christ's adoption of humanity being placed in parallel with the embodiment of lofty significance in lowly image.

But Bonaventure was by no means alone in doing this. To take but one example among many, in his *Tractatus de diversis materiis predicabilibus* (composed not later than 1261) the Dominican friar Étienne de Bourbon justifies *exempla* and similitudes on the grounds that Christ preached in this manner; this procedure is in some sense paralleled by the way in which Christ became incarnate and clothed himself in flesh, so that men could know him more easily.¹⁶ Similarly, Étienne continues, Dionysius says that the wise philosophers made their sayings corporeal by clothing them in similitudes and examples. All this functions within the parameters of the argument that *exempla* are of great use in the instruction of the simple and rude man because they imprint themselves on the memory the more easily and are remembered the longer. Both Étienne and Bonaventure, then, seem to see no paradox in their enlistment of Pseudo-Dionysius in the service of the *rudes*. But this is to be expected, given the wider perspective of an extensive and impressively efficient process of assimilation whereby Pseudo-Dionysius was rendered more acceptable to mainstream Christian belief.¹⁷

¹⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 1, in the version of Thomas Gallus; trans. Minnis and Scott, p. 174.

¹⁶ A. Lecoy de la Marche, ed., *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues tirés du recueil inédit d'Étienne de Bourbon*, Société de l'Histoire de France (Paris, 1877), pp. 3–5.

¹⁷ Several aspects of this assimilation are well described by J. McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 96–8, 365–6.

And I certainly do not wish to be read as suggesting that Bonaventure is in some way culpable on account of the fissures which underlie his text. My aim is rather to highlight the problems which his clerical culture inevitably confronted when it brought together discourses from different contexts which implicated different and sometimes contesting ideologies. Bonaventure finds in the theory of the various *sensūs Scripturae* a method of expressing synthesis and control whilst maintaining respect for diversity. Moving away from the point that Christ's teaching is appropriately humble in word and profound in meaning, Bonaventure stresses that no mind can escape God's truth, which is taught in its entirety, and therefore it is fitting that several *sensūs* should be hidden in one and the same passage of Scripture. He then proceeds to describe the end or *finis* of holy Scripture, which is man's salvation, which enables him to exploit the standard distinction between significative words and significative things in Scripture (cf. p. 233 above); it is the latter which give rise to the *sensūs* which exist apart from the literal sense. As Bonaventure puts it here, holy Scripture takes up the book of God's creation, making it relate to Scripture's end through a threefold manner of understanding, namely the tropological, allegorical and anagogical senses.

Bonaventure's main and arguably most successful strategy of control, however, consists in his segregation of the senses from the modes of Scripture. The fourth section of the prologue to his *Breviloquium* ends with the account of the four senses of Scripture which we have just cited; in the following (fifth) section it is the turn of the modes of procedure to receive exclusive attention.¹⁸ Among all the many kinds of wisdom which are contained in the dimensions of Scripture (including its depth, the keynote term of section 4), Bonaventure explains, there is one common method of proceeding, which is by authority. Here divine authority is contrasted with human reasoning. Given that humans can deceive or be deceived, their authority is not absolutely certain. Only God and the holy Spirit cannot be deceived; thus holy Scripture, 'in order that it should be perfectly authoritative', was 'handed down not through human enquiry but through divine revelation'. Hence the Bible does not employ the *modus* of human reasoning (by definition, division and inferring, which are characteristic procedures of the other sciences) but rather adapts

¹⁸ *Breviloquium*, Prologus, 5; trans. based on Minnis and Scott, pp. 235–6.

its own modes 'to the various dispositions of men's minds which incline those minds differently'.

Thus, if a man is not moved to heed precepts and prohibitions, he may at least be moved by the examples narrated; if someone is not moved by these, he may be moved by the benefits which are pointed out to him; and if he is not moved by these, he may be moved by wise warnings, by promises which ring true, by terrifying threats; and thus be stirred to devotion and praise of God, and thereby receive grace which will guide him to the practice of virtuous works.

Here is the discourse of rhetorical persuasion—which, as already noted, is fundamental to the *modus procedendi* of sacred science—which has been adapted to include an emphasis on the outcome of the 'movement' in question, namely, the achievement of salvation. That, as Bonaventure has said previously, is the *finis* of Scripture. But it would seem that that end is served by means which are different, separate, and segregated. There is no attempt to map the modes onto the senses, or vice-versa. Bonaventure has divided and conquered—or at least avoided—the problem. Thus he allows the *sensūs Scripturae* to appear within a celebration of the universal audience-appeal of the Bible, to occupy territory which is, so to speak, naturally inhabited by the audience-centred discourse of the *multiplex modus*.

In the *Summa Alexandri*, however, the modes and the senses feature in one and the same discussion, and the problem is more obvious. In presenting the argument that Scripture has a multiple mode of procedure, the net is cast very wide.¹⁹ God spoke in many different ways to the prophets (Hebrews 1.1); similarly, the wisdom of God is described as 'manifold' (Ephesians 3.8–10). Therefore there does not seem to be a uniform, single mode in either the Old Testament or the New. Likewise, the *Summa* continues, there is a fourfold sense in the words of holy Scripture. Here Bede as cited in the *Glossa ordinaria* is drawn on for definitions of history, allegory, tropology and anagogy, and the stock example of Jerusalem (again from the *Glossa*) is trotted out: 'following the historical sense Jerusalem is a city; allegorically it signifies the Church; according to the tropological sense . . . it is the soul of any faithful Christian; according to the anagogical sense it is the life of all heavenly beings', who come to see God. Then we are taken into the textual details of first the Old and then

¹⁹ Tract. introduct., qu. 1, ch. 4, art. 3; trans. based on Minnis and Scott, pp. 217–20.

the New Testament: in the Pentateuch 'the mode is that of instruction; in the historical books, it is historical and by way of example', and so forth; concomitantly, in the Gospels the mode is partly historical and partly by command and instruction, while in the Apocalypse it is revelatory. Another sudden shift of direction follows: we are plunged into the world of Pseudo-Dionysius, who spoke of two kinds of 'holy manifestation'; i.e. images of God can be drawn from either things which are supposedly akin to things divine or from things which are quite obviously dissimilar to Him.

This, to be sure, is very much a mixed bag; we have moved from 'modal' discourse through the language of the *sensūs Scripturae* to the discourse of Dionysian symbolism. But the collective force of all this does seem to support the argument that throughout holy Scripture a variety of modes of procedure is in use. The *Summa* then brings forth major contrary arguments. In the first instance, a multiple mode confuses the understanding whereas a uniform mode is easier to comprehend. Moreover, our understanding is better informed by fewer facts than by many. Then again, surely the mode of Scripture must proceed by the 'smoother and clearer' way.

There follows a definitive solution of the issue, which comes down in favour of the suitability of a *multiplex modus Scripturae*—and proclaims the pre-eminence of the intellectual equipment of that specific discourse. There are three reasons, the argument runs, why the Biblical mode must be manifold. First, the 'effector' or author of holy Scripture, the holy Spirit, is 'single yet multiple', and this should appear in the realm of sacred science. Secondly, the wisdom of God takes on many forms, and this multiform matter is fittingly matched by a multiform mode. The third reason relates to the *finis* or objective of sacred Scripture. The *Summa Alexandri* spends most time on this, elaborating a justification of varied scriptural styles from the key rhetorical principle that the type of teaching should be appropriate to the audience which is being taught; because people are different their instruction must be different.

The conditions of men are manifold: in the time of the Law, in the time after the Law, in the time of prophecy, in the time of grace. Even within these periods the conditions of men are manifold. For some are sluggish in matters relating to faith, some are rebellious in matters relating to good morality, and [fall short] in different ways. Some pass their lives in prosperity, some in adversity, some in good works, and some in sin.

The *Summa*'s dismissal of the objections to this view ruthlessly affirms the rhetorical, audience-oriented thrust of modal discourse. 'The understanding may be slow, it may be quick' or moderately quick, and so, 'the truth must be taught in different ways and in a different form to the slow, quick, and moderately quick understanding'; besides, 'the simple-minded young must be instructed in a different way from those who are fully adult'. And so forth. The distinctive and differently-oriented discourses of *quadruplex sensus* and Dionysian symbolism, as (briefly) featured earlier in the discussion, are here given no space in which to assert themselves. In this conclusive treatment, the *multiplex modus* bears the weight of the rationalisation of the Bible's universal appeal; at this point the *Summa Alexandri* is not interested in exploring the 'something for everyone' implications of the *quadruplex sensus*, as found in our selected passage from Bonaventure's *Breviloquium*.

If the *Summa Alexandri* may be regarded as having privileged modal discourse, then the *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum* of the secular master Henry of Ghent (who died in 1293)²⁰ can arguably be taken as the victory of *sensus* over *modus*. Henry's main target is indubitably the *Summa Alexandri*, and he argues vehemently against the earlier treatise's affirmation of the *multiplex modus*: in his opinion the diversity in question 'does not lie in the mode of treating or handing down this subject-matter [i.e. of theology]' but rather in the subject-matter itself, which manifests itself in various forms.²¹ At one point the Bible 'hands down precepts, at another deals out prohibitions, at another sets before the reader grounds for fear, or hope, or similar things of this sort'. But these phenomena do not mean that the mode of this science is manifold: rather, 'the same mode of scientific treatment

²⁰ Henry of Ghent, a Paris-trained theologian, was a canon at Tournai in 1276, and later archdeacon successively of Bruges (1276) and Tournai (1278). Nowadays he tends to be unfairly neglected, though in his time he evolved an elaborate system of thought which rivaled those of the Dominican master Thomas Aquinas and the Franciscan master Bonaventure. The Prologue to Henry's *Summa* was first written c. 1275–6 and edited towards the end of his career, in 1289. On Henry as exegete see A.J. Minnis, 'The *Accessus* Extended: Henry of Ghent on the Transmission and Reception of Theology', in Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr., eds., *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1992), pp. 275–326; also A.J. Minnis, 'Medium and Message: Henry of Ghent on Scriptural Style', in Richard G. Newhauser and John A. Alford, eds., *Literature and Religion in the Later Middle Ages: Philological Studies in Honor of Siegfried Wenzel* (Binghamton, N.Y., 1995), pp. 209–35.

²¹ *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum*, Prologus, art. 14, qu. 1; *Summa in tres partes praecipuas digesta* (Ferrara, 1649), i.247–9; trans. Minnis and Scott, pp. 251–6.

can well be used in treating different subjects', whether the subjects are terrifying, or forbidding, and the like. In Henry's view that is precisely what is happening in sacred Scripture. Countering the term *modus tractandi* (with its rhetorical implications), he prefers to use *modus tradendi*, thereby unambiguously designating the manner in which theology has been handed down from God to man. Thus the unique credentials of holy Scripture are affirmed, with divine authorship being privileged over human participation, and revelation clearly towering over rhetoric. But what, then, of the fact that 'God's wisdom is manifold and the human condition is manifold'? As far as the divine wisdom is concerned, one mode of treatment can be said to be involved in each and every aspect of God's wisdom, though in one case His wisdom may move him to issue commands, in another to enforce prohibitions, and the like. It is not the case, declares Henry, that one piece of the manifold science of God is taught in one place, and another part in another, but rather that in each theological *sermo* 'a manifold knowledge of God is gained in accordance with the multiplicity of textual meaning (*sensus*) and of exposition'. In short, as far as this argument is concerned at least, God's multi-form wisdom manifests itself in different senses rather than in different modes.

According to Henry's thinking, theology 'is not able to cover all the individual things which relate to its subject-matter individually and separately, and to teach the elements of Christian belief in a way that exactly suits all the various conditions that men find themselves in'. Instead there are many *sententiae* in one *sermo*, and here is where the individual tailoring to suit the various conditions comes in: 'the man who cannot assimilate more may be content with the surface literal interpretation', but the man who has the requisite ability 'may seek the spiritual understanding beneath the literal one, depending on the progress he has made'. (We may note here once again the association of the literal sense with what is initial and elementary.) Henry supports his arguments with Augustine's comment on the complexity of the Book of Genesis; the saint had envisaged a text with a style which on the one hand would not put off those readers who saw it as being far beyond their capacity, and on the other would support and satisfy the meanings identified by its most sophisticated students. 'From this each may draw off for himself whatever truth he can' regarding the Creation, 'each expressing different opinions'.

Concerning the manifold nature of the human condition, Henry argues as follows:

... the mode of this science [i.e. theology] cannot be manifold simply because of the manifold nature of the human condition. For in that case, that science would have to be passed on to one sort of men in one place, and to another sort in a different place, and not in its totality in all places. Thus, it would not be offered in its totality everywhere to every condition of men. This is quite false . . .

He is adamant that 'all Scripture is offered on a common basis to all men for consideration, and it adapts itself to each according to his capacity to understand'. Those who say that 'the mode of this science ought to take many forms so that in one way and in one place the truth may be taught' to the unintelligent, and in a different way and in another place to the intelligent, are quite wrong. True, these different kinds of men should receive different kinds of instruction: 'But this is achieved by the two groups' receiving the exposition of the Scriptures in two different senses, not because two different texts of Scripture are offered them for their consideration'. In other words, the manifold nature of the human condition is addressed and catered for in the manifold nature of the senses of Scripture.

In my view, Henry of Ghent was very aware of the tensions between the senses and the modes of Scripture, and saw the latter as subversive of the former—hence the latter had to go, at least in the form in which some of his predecessors and contemporaries had defined it. However, it has to be said that within the history of exegetical theory some of Henry's discussions appear as somewhat conservative, as redolent of twelfth-century rather than thirteenth-century values. Despite his strictures the idea of the *multiplex modus* was highly influential; it expressed something of the spirit of an age which had taken to its heart the recently-recovered works of Aristotle, thereby creating an intellectual milieu in which the 'literal sense' was afforded considerable trust whereas allegorical language was viewed with unease. The literal sense expressed the intention of the human authors of Scripture, but different authors expressed themselves in different ways, or indeed one and the same author could express himself in different ways in different places. And here the theory of the different modes of Scripture could come in, to reinforce a view of holy Scripture in which inspired but human writers (or, 'efficient causes', as they were designated within the Aristotelian schema) were

seen as producers or co-producers of the various Biblical styles and structures (designated as aspects of 'formal cause').²² Seen in this light, the *multiplex modus* of Scripture was quite antithetical to its spiritual *sensūs*—but not to its literal sense. Quite the contrary, in fact.

While the term *sensus litteralis* could in certain contexts still retain negative associations with the elementary and simple (as our chosen passages from Bonaventure and Henry of Ghent have illustrated), in many others it became a prestige-term, a marker of great respect for a type of textual expression and/or a method of textual exposition. In order to substantiate this I wish to call a new witness, a scholar who operated very far from the thirteenth-century University of Paris which has been the milieu with which I have been concerned thus far, though his thought was heavily influenced by Thomism. This is Alfonso de Madrigal, otherwise known as 'El Tostado', who lived from around 1410 until 1455, a product of the University of Salamanca who enjoyed the patronage of Juan II of Castile and ended his days as Bishop of Avila.²³ Alfonso's highly ambitious and unfairly neglected Bible commentary includes, as one of the 90 *quaestiones* on Matthew 13 alone (!), a subtle discussion of the *quadruplex sensus* which systematically discusses no fewer than five ways in which the literal sense may be regarded as superior to the mystical sense: because it is immediate, determinate, verifiable (i.e. it can be adjudged to be true or false), capable of being fulfilled, and it can furnish proof in argument.²⁴

The *sensus litteralis* is the only 'immediate' sense, whereas the other three are 'mediate', since they are signified by the things which 'the letter' signifies. The literal sense is the only sense which is intended by the *littera*, declares de Madrigal; the others are not the senses of the *littera* but rather of the things which the *littera* signifies, whence they are called mystical or special, i.e. not of the *littera* itself, and

²² On the 'Aristotelian Prologues' to commentaries, which provided a template for general analysis of a work, see Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, pp. 28–9, 145, 148–9; Minnis and Scott, pp. 198–200.

²³ For de Madrigal's dates I depend on the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*. He attained the title of Master of Arts at Salamanca in 1432 and in 1441 that of Master of Theology. During his 25 years in the university he taught poetry, moral philosophy and theology, and served as chancellor. On El Tostado as exegete see A.J. Minnis, 'Fifteenth Century Versions of Literalism: Girolamo Savonarola and Alfonso de Madrigal', in Lerner, ed., *Neue Richtungen in der hoch- und spätmittelalterlichen Bibelexegese*, cited above in n. 2, pp. 163–80.

²⁴ *Opera omnia quotquot in scriptura sacra expositionem et alia* (Cologne, 1613), ix, pt. 2, 85–8.

this accounts for the initial division into the literal and mystical senses of Scripture.

Secondly, de Madrigal argues that the literal sense is the only fixed, 'determinate' (*determinatus*) sense, for it is not in our power to give the *littera* whatever sense we want, but rather we must accept that which the *littera* produces. The mystical senses, by contrast, can be changed at will (*iuxta voluntatem nostram*). For example, the death of Goliath can be allegorically interpreted either as the destruction of the power of the devil by Christ's passion or as the victory which Christ won over death through His resurrection. Which of these two senses is signified here is not a major issue. Similarly, the tropological and anagogical senses can be multiplied and varied. The reason for this is that the literal sense is taken from (*elicitus*) the *littera* whereas the mystical sense is attached or added (*applicitus*) to it, and because such addition is in our power, we are able to vary the mystical senses freely. But the *littera* is unitary, onefold (*unica*), and therefore what is elicited from it must needs be a unitary sense.

Alfonso then considers the implications of the fact that certain scriptural passages seem to have two literal senses. At Exodus 12.46 it is said concerning the Paschal lamb, 'neither shall you break a bone thereof'. While the literal meaning of this passage, which refers to a Jewish ceremonial, is obvious enough, clearly it would seem to refer to Christ, as is confirmed by John 19.36, where it is said that in order 'that the scripture might be fulfilled' Christ's legs were not broken on the cross. The only way in which this might be fulfilled, declares Alfonso, is in the sense in which the passage is written, and this is the literal sense. Then there is the case of the statement, 'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son' (II Kings 7.14; I Paralipomenon 22.10). Literally, this refers to Solomon, who is spoken of there, and yet in Hebrews 1.5 St Paul alleges that this is to be understood of Christ. If that understanding is regarded as allegorical, then the passage cannot be used as a proof, since mystical senses cannot be used to prove (a point which Alfonso will expand later).²⁵ Alfonso resolves the problem by explaining that the textual phenomenon in question is not due to the nature of 'the letter' (*conditio litterae*), because in itself the *littera* is disposed to a single, determinate signification—unless, of course, the author wishes to say many

²⁵ See p. 247 below.

things at once, through equivocation, ambiguity, composition and division. What happens is that in some cases two senses are established for a single *littera* by literal evidence from outside the original passage itself. Thus John 19.36 establishes a second literal sense for Exodus 12.46 ('neither shall you break a bone thereof'). So, whether the literal sense is single or twofold, the sense is always determined by what can be had from the *littera* itself, and not by other means.

Thirdly, Alfonso argues that Scripture cannot be termed true or false in its mystical senses but only in its literal sense. Mystical senses are not senses of Scripture but of the things verbally signified by Scripture; only significative words can be judged to be true or false. Besides, if a mystical sense were to be true or false it would have to be single rather than multiple, because if a series of alternative (and discordant) mystical senses was proposed they could not all claim to be judged in respect of their truth or falsity, and there would be no means of distinguishing between them.

Fourthly, Scripture cannot be completed or fulfilled in its mystical sense but only in its literal sense. For it is only in respect of the *sensus literalis*, which is either true or false, that it can be verified to be fulfilled or not, as when John 19.36 says regarding Christ's legs not being broken, 'these things were done, that the scripture might be fulfilled'. In the case of the mystical sense completion would involve the completion of all the allegories and all the tropologies which we would wish to apply, and we could not know when this was completed, since it would always be possible to apply yet another mystical sense. Then, it might be said that a passage was completed in one of its mystical senses but not in another (all mystical senses being equal in status). Therefore, only in the literal sense may a passage of Scripture be fulfilled, for only it is unitary and determinate, and here there is no contradiction, no uncertainty, and nothing which is unfitting. But what about those passages where there are two literal senses? No passage can have two equally important literal senses, responds Alfonso, and Scripture is said to be fulfilled when the more important one is fulfilled; in the case of the passage about the bones not being broken the principal sense is the one which relates to Christ.

Passages like I Corinthians 10.11, 'all these things happened to them in figure', justify the interpretation of Jewish ceremonies in terms of events relating to the life of Christ, but does this not introduce confusion, because of the many different ways in which such

interpretation may be carried out? Alfonso argues that there is no problem here, because events (*res gestas*)²⁶ in the Old Testament generally signify in the allegorical sense certain events in the New; as far as the Old Testament itself is concerned, however, all that is being signified literally is the actual Jewish ceremonies. Therefore the literal sense remains fixed and unconfused.

Fifthly and finally, arguments may be drawn only from the literal sense of Scripture. Mystical senses do not prove, Alfonso declares, because in proof we are seeking to prove that something is true or false, and since one cannot say that a certain Scriptural passage is true or false in its mystical sense, the mystical sense cannot be used in argument. Moreover, proof always proceeds from what is known. Since mystical senses are uncertain because it is not evident whether this is the sense rather than that, it follows that they cannot be used in the process of proof. Indeed, a single passage can have disparate and opposing mystical senses, and therefore one and the same passage could be cited in proving different and contradictory things, which is quite unfitting. In sum, from the literal sense alone may be drawn proof in argument, because this sense is determinate; by contrast, 'mystical theology does not prove' (here Alfonso manipulates an *auctoritas* from Pseudo-Dionysius), which is to say that Scripture in its mystical sense is incapable of furnishing proof.

This particular argument is, of course, an elaboration of what Thomas Aquinas had said in his *Summa theologiae*: 'All argument must derive from this [i.e. the literal sense] alone, and not from what is said in the allegorical sense, as Augustine says in the letter against Vincent the Donatist'.²⁷ That is a somewhat ingenious application of what Augustine had actually said; the saint certainly had not in mind the rigorously logical, syllogistic argumentation which Aquinas sought to invoke, and which Alfonso de Madrigal was subsequently to reaffirm. Here we encounter a substantial paradox. On the one hand scholastic theologians sought to affirm the superiority of divine science over human science by (*inter alia*) identifying the *modus tractandi/procedendi* of theology as being very different from the *modus* characteristic of the other branches of knowledge, which proceeds

²⁶ As opposed to words. Here once again we have an exploitation of the distinction between significative words and significative things (cf. pp. 233, 238 above).

²⁷ *Summa theologiae*, 1a, q. 1, a. 10, resp.; trans. Minnis and Scott, p. 242. The Augustine reference is to *Epist.* xciii.8.24.

'by definition, analysis, and deduction'. On the other hand, as men at the cutting edge of the intellectual developments of their day, they were very keen to enlist the *modus definitivus, divisivus et collectivus* in the service of divine science, and justified their involvement through (for example) the image of a handmaiden attending the queen (though it must be admitted that sometimes it looked as if the handmaiden was herself on the throne).²⁸ Philosophy and 'the Philosopher' (Aristotle) along with his Islamic interpreters were certainly not christened, but their expertise was granted considerable importance within limits which the schoolmen sought to contain and control (often in the face of considerable controversy and amidst charges of error and indeed of heresy). The strict and exacting analysis of the linguistic and stylistic qualities of holy Scripture which was carried out throughout late-medieval Europe, forming a common preoccupation in schools as far apart as Paris and Salamanca, had such cultural forces among their major motivations.

All of this may be illustrated by the single most sustained and influential piece of 'literalistic' exegesis to have been produced during the Middle Ages, the *Postilla litteralis* of the Franciscan scholar Nicholas of Lyre (c. 1270–1340).²⁹ The second prologue placed at the head of this work trenchantly criticises the various ways in which the literal sense has been 'greatly obscured in these modern times', partly due to the faults of scribes and correctors but also because of 'the manner of expounding the text commonly handed down by others'.³⁰ Although those 'others' have 'said much that is good, yet they have been inadequate in their treatment of the literal sense, and have so multiplied the number of mystical senses that the literal sense is in some part cut off and suffocated among so many mystical senses'. Therefore, Lyre continues, he intends to concentrate on the literal sense, only rarely interposing 'a few brief mystical explanations on occasion'. In order to 'illuminate the literal meaning of the text' he has cited 'the statements not only of Catholic but also of Jewish

²⁸ On such developments see especially M.-D. Chenu, *La Théologie comme science au XIII^e siècle*, 3rd ed., Bibliothèque Thomiste 33 (Paris, 1969); U. Köpf, *Die Anfänge der theologischen Wissenschaftstheorie im 13. Jahrhundert*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 49 (Tübingen, 1974).

²⁹ Lyre studied theology and later became regent master (after 1380) at Paris. He is widely regarded as the best-equipped Biblical scholar of the Christian Middle Ages.

³⁰ Trans. Minnis and Scott, pp. 268–9.

teachers, and especially Rabbi Solomon [i.e. Rashi].³¹ Moreover, in his pursuit of this objective he draws heavily on the statements of the philosophers, as his commentary on Genesis abundantly illustrates.³² This exegesis reveals the intellectual vigour and challenge of the union of *sensus literalis* and human science.

Lyre shares St Augustine's admiration for the sheer complexity of Genesis, and its receptivity to so many different opinions (cf. p. 242 above). Indeed, declares Lyre, it is so full of obscurities that 'among the Jews' no one reads it before he is thirty years old.³³ Those obscurities are quite apparent from the varied and multiple expositions of Genesis which have been provided as much from the Hebrew doctors as from the Catholic ones. Because confusion is inimical to intelligence and memory, Lyre seeks to distance himself from such multiplicity of exposition, especially those interpretations which are remote from the literal sense, 'which sense I wish to pursue in accordance with grace given me by God'.

He proceeds to specify three traditional expositions of Genesis, to which the others can be reduced. The first is that of Augustine, who expounded the six days not on account of their temporal succession but in respect of angelic knowledge relative to the six types of created things. This approach is briefly summarised, but Lyre refuses to go into it in detail, because, he declares, it is extremely far removed from the literal sense. The literal sense was particularly important to Moses, he explains, because (according to certain saints and doctors) he was speaking to an unlearned populace (*rudi populo*), which could not grasp spiritual things, only corporeal and 'broad' (*grossa*) ones. Therefore he could not make express mention of the creation

³¹ On Lyre's debt to Rashi see H. Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars* (Pittsburgh, 1963), pp. 137–246. It should, however, be emphasised that Lyre's use of Rabbinic exegesis was highly selective, and he was concerned to keep his distance from what he describes, here in this Second Prologue, as the 'blindness in Israel'. Some of the teachings of the Jews are, he declares, 'very absurd', and one must not adhere to them 'except in so far as they are in accord with reason and the true literal meaning' (Minnis and Scott, p. 270). See further Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982), pp. 170–95, who argues that 'it is quite likely' that Lyre 'consciously conceived of an attack upon the Jews and their interpretation of Scripture as an important aspect of his commentary' (p. 177).

³² The following account is based on the opening discussion in Lyre's Genesis commentary; *Biblia sacra cum glossis* (Lyon, 1545), i, fol. 23r–23v.

³³ Lyre claims as his authority for this statement the *sententia* of Jerome in his letter to Paulinus Presbyter.

of angels. Moreover, because the people were prone to idolatry, if he had spoken of creatures that were spiritual and invisible they would have been worshipped as gods. Therefore, this exposition which is remote from the letter is dismissed, Lyre being convinced that it is too far from the author's intention and from the characteristics of the audience which the author sought to address.

The other two expositions are, however, nearer to the letter, and therefore Lyre declares his intention of following them; they are described as proceeding in accordance with various opinions on the nature of matter as propounded by philosophers. Somewhat confusingly, Lyre takes some time to come to them. First he moves straight into an account of the three 'established opinions' on the nature of matter—an excursus which will, to be sure, subsequently prove important for his 'literal' readings.

The first of these 'established opinions' follows 'the Commentator' (Averroes). In the strict sense of the term 'matter' (i.e. understanding it in terms of composite substance) matter is not present in heavenly bodies. For matter (in terms of its substance) has the potency to either exist or not. But heavenly bodies do not have this potency, since they are incorruptible and therefore cannot cease to be. It follows that, when philosophers speak of matter being in heavenly bodies, they are understanding the term in a loose sense (*large accipiendo*), i.e. taking *subiectum* as matter, whereas it actually refers to local motion (which is defined in Aristotle's *Physics* as the first species of motion).

The second established opinion is that in heavenly bodies there *is* matter, which consists of composite substance—but heavenly bodies are to be firmly distinguished from elements and mixed bodies. For a heavenly body has the potential of the specific form which it possesses, and no other. Hence the matter of the sun has solely the potency of the form of the sun and of no other form (i.e. the sun's matter could not appear in any other form). And this is true of other heavenly bodies, wherefore they are incorruptible. By contrast, the elements and mixed bodies can exist in many forms, which need not appear in one and the same matter. When a body of this kind exists in one form it has the potential to exist in another. And thus it is deprived of that other, and hence in this case we may speak of deprivation (*privatio*). And *privatio* always implies the notion of injury, harm, evil (*maleficium*), as is said in the first book of Aristotle's *Physics*.

Thirdly, 'others say' that matter of the same kind that exists in bodies which are generatable and corruptible also exists in heavenly

bodies. Their reasoning is as follows. Considered apart from all possible forms, matter (*in genere substantiae* and *pars composita*) can only be understood as pure potential. Within that potential no distinctions may be made—this can only be done in act. There is no means whereby *this* matter can be distinguished from *that*. However, although (in this view) matter, on the same definition, exists in both corruptible and incorruptible bodies, corruptible bodies would be inferior. For, as Aristotle says in *De sensu et sensato*, fire and earth are not active and ‘passive’ as such in substantial form but only in respect of their contrary properties: and it is in respect of their active and contrary properties that they change, are generated, and die. For example, the substantial form of water has coldness and humidity joined to it, these being the cause of water’s generation and corruption. However, the substantial forms of heavenly bodies do not have such active and passive qualities annexed to them; consequently there is no *passio* or receptivity in them and so they are incorruptible (even though they have matter on the same definition as the matter possessed by corruptible bodies).

Which of these three opinions is the more true is not, Lyre declares, part of his brief in the present inquiry. He will not introduce a lot of arguments, he says, since (as was said above) he intends to insist on the exposition of ‘the letter’. In accordance with this purpose he will expound the text of the beginning of Genesis variously, according to the aforesaid different opinions. Thus the reader can choose whichever exposition he wishes, or indeed follow both if he wishes.

At long last, Lyre proceeds to define his two literal expositions. The first is as follows. All the principal parts of the universe (i.e. the heavenly bodies and the elements) were produced in their distinctive substantial forms by the work of Creation, and in the three following days all the work of distinction or formation was carried out, while the fourth day saw the work of ornamentation of the heavenly bodies (this being understood as meaning that their accidental properties and qualities were added). The following exposition, Lyre continues, proceeds in accordance with the two main opinions concerning the nature of matter which were put forward above, namely that there is *no* matter in heavenly bodies (cf. the first ‘established opinion’, following Averroes, as described above),³⁴ and that in fact

³⁴ Here Lyre emphasises that those who hold this opinion cannot say that the matter of all bodies was produced under one common form, and subsequently divided into its various parts by specific substantial forms. Since in their view there

there *is* matter in heavenly bodies.³⁵ Lyre's second literal exposition is, he claims, held by Strabo, Bede and other doctors. This is, that the matter of all bodies and elements produced by the work of Creation was produced under one common form, in terms of substance, as being of 'corporeity', and the subsequent days were distinguished according to their diverse parts by specific forms, as heavenly and elemental.

These, then, are the two literal expositions which Lyre has promised to bring into play. Yet even at this point of resolution he worries about what his audience can or cannot cope with. If each and every passage was expounded according to both of his literal expositions, the frequent movement from one exposition to the other would confute the intellect. Accordingly, Lyre intends to expound the text from its beginning up to the fourth day of Creation first according to the first meaning and secondly according to the second one. The text which follows after the fourth day may be expounded uniformly in respect of both opinions. In sum, here is a reading of Scripture which prioritises intellectual precision and clarity of speech, with respect to both the *auctor* and the exegete. It is not just that the *modus procedendi* of human science is of great utility in expounding the literal sense of Genesis, though that is certainly true: it is also the case that Moses himself is seen as something of a literalist, a man as concerned with the needs and capacities of his audience as was his great fourteenth-century commentator Nicholas of Lyre.

Lyre's Genesis commentary thus professes the possibility of different literal expositions of a Biblical text, of different ways of reading its literal sense, and the freedom of the reader to pick and choose. Far from being a mere shell or veil which should quickly be jettisoned as the interpreter moves into the complexities of the other senses, the literal sense is itself fraught with complexities, which are the fit subject of the most erudite interpretation possible. The prestige of

is no matter in heavenly bodies, they have to say that in the beginning all heavenly bodies were produced in their distinct substantial forms.

³⁵ If the matter of a heavenly body is 'in potential' in respect of the substantial form which it possesses, Lyre declares, then it cannot be said that both heavenly bodies and the elements were produced under one common form, and afterwards divided by means of substantial forms. For otherwise the matter of heavenly bodies would be in potential not only to one form but to many. (Only the matter of corruptible bodies is capable of taking on different forms, to reiterate Lyre's earlier account.)

the literal sense is evident—and its parameters have been considerably widened.

In view of this, it is hardly surprising that more and more textual effects should be classified as aspects of the literal sense. We have already considered Alfonso de Madrigal's ingenious arguments concerning the existence in certain scriptural passages of a double literal sense—an extraordinary extension of the scope of 'the letter'. Here the Spaniard was enhancing an idea which had received its classic formulation in the *Postilla litteralis* of Nicholas of Lyre, one of his major sources and influences.³⁶ Lyre's notion of the *duplex sensus litteralis* is also reiterated and substantially amplified in the *Summa in quaestionibus Armenorum* of Richard FitzRalph (c. 1295–1360), a chancellor of Oxford University who became Archbishop of Armagh in 1347.³⁷ Concomitant with this development was the identification of a vast array of figurative expressions as falling within the realm of the *sensus litteralis*. This is how the *Summa Alexandri* and the *summae* of Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent classify proverbs, parables, likenesses, ironies and metaphors, the basic idea being that sometimes Biblical authors express themselves openly and plainly, using words in their 'proper' or normal significations, whilst on other occasions they introduce figurative expressions, wherein the words are used in 'transferred' or non-referential significations.³⁸ [On expanding dimensions of the 'literal' sense in late medieval and subsequent Christian interpretation, see chapters 1 (iii) and 2 (viii). —ed.] De Madrigal put an interesting twist on Aquinas's account of parabolic language, spending more time wrestling with the problem that every literal sense should be true, yet the parabolic and metaphorical senses are not true, as when (for example) God is said to have eyes, which in

³⁶ In the second prologue to his *Postilla litteralis* Lyre considers the case of I Paralipomenon 22.10: literally this refers to Solomon, yet at Hebrews 1.5 St Paul takes it as referring to Christ. The Apostle must have taken it literally, since the *littera* is being adduced as proof that Christ is greater than any angel, and proof cannot be had from a mystical sense, as Augustine says (and as Aquinas reiterated in the passage from his *Summa theologiae* which we have quoted above, p. 247). Lyre goes on to explain that Solomon fulfilled the prophecy less perfectly than Christ: he was the son of God *per gratiam* whereas Christ is the Son of God *per naturam*. See further the related discussions in Lyre's expositions of II Kings 7 (*Biblia sacra*, ii, fol. 104v) and Hebrews 1.5 (vi, fol. 134v).

³⁷ See A.J. Minnis, "Authorial Intention" and "Literal Sense" in the Exegetical Theories of Richard FitzRalph and John Wyclif', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 75, section C, no. 1 (Dublin, 1975), especially pp. 8–10.

³⁸ Cf. Minnis and Scott, pp. 205, 220–3, 241–3, 257, 262.

fact He does not have. Alfonso, like Aquinas, rejects the suggestion that the parabolic sense is a sense in its own right, distinct from the others, but the way he does it is rather different from Aquinas's method. We are not dealing with something which is literally intended by the author; neither is it a sense applied by us (as are the mystical senses). Rather, concludes Alfonso, it is a sort of veiled literal sense (*quoddam velamentum sensus litteralis*). As such it is not itself literal but is directed towards (*ordinatur*) the literal sense, either to veil or decorate it, or there may be other reasons. (Here is quite a reversal. Once regarded as the expendable veil or shell, the *sensus litteralis* may now be taken as the valued interior which is itself veiled.)³⁹ On the other hand, he continues, if we are making a larger and looser categorization of the senses then the parabolic sense may be listed along with the others, so that there may be said to be five senses *in* Scripture, but there are not five senses *of* Scripture.

Leaving the issue of parabolic signification aside, can any other sense in Scripture claim to be a sense of Scripture? Alfonso's answer is in the negative; he is quite content to stay with the *quadruplex sensus*. History, etiology and analogy all pertain to the literal sense (this follows Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*)⁴⁰ since each of them is determined by 'the letter' even though they do not all occur in each and every passage, because Scripture has a *triplex modus procedendi*. These do not turn out to be the items that comprise the *multiplex modus Scripturae* in the tradition associated with the *Summa Alexandri*. Instead Alfonso simply explains that sometimes Scripture narrates, sometimes it explains the cause of what is being narrated (this being etiology), and sometimes it provides analogies (*concordantes*); all of these are governed by the authorial intention as expressed in the *sensus litteralis*. Here, then, is evidence at once of the high status enjoyed by the literal sense and of the fact that modal discourse (however specifically defined) was associated with the literal sense as generated by the inspired human author of Scripture. In short, the empire of 'the letter' seems impregnable, utterly dominant in the world of late-medieval Christian exegesis.

³⁹ Cf. especially the imagery and ideology of 'veiling' in twelfth-century Neoplatonic allegorising, as discussed by Winthrop Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century* (Princeton, 1972), pp. 36–66; Peter Dronke, *Fabula: Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism* (Leiden, 1974); Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 204–5, 247, etc.

⁴⁰ 1a, q. 1, a. 10, ad 2um; trans. Minnis and Scott, p. 242.

But to say that would be to perpetuate a major historical inaccuracy, to sponsor a gross cultural oversimplification. Of course, the *sensus literalis* was a prestigious term and the discourse associated with it was held in high esteem, with the result that it was stretched almost to breaking-point. But that does not mean that the spiritual/mystical senses of Scripture were, so to speak, banned from the state. In 1339 that arch-‘literalist’ Nicholas of Lyre wrote a *Postilla moralis*, ‘for the readers of Bibles and preachers of the word of God’.⁴¹ In this work, despite his advocacy in the *Postilla literalis* of the literal sense of Genesis, he was perfectly happy to read the originary account of the macrocosm in terms of its alleged moral import for the microcosm or little world of man. Alfonso de Madrigal, whose Bible scholarship may to some extent be regarded as an attempt to compete with and surpass the work of Nicholas of Lyre (the anxiety of influence is often palpable), also sought to produce a moral reading of the entire Bible: and yet this is the exegete who affirmed the importance of the *sensus literalis* on the grounds that it is immediate, determinate, verifiable, capable of being fulfilled, and able to furnish proof in argument. In the later Middle Ages there remained a substantial market for *moralizatio*, as may be illustrated by the popularity of Pierre Bersuire’s monumental *Reductorium morale*, which included both a moralised Bible and a moralised ‘Pagan Bible’, the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid.⁴² Bersuire claimed that his work was of particular usefulness to preachers, an assertion that some of his modern readers have found rather hard to credit, though it is indubitable that tropology of the kind which he retails so avidly is a major feature of late-medieval sermons, whether preached in Latin or in the European vernaculars.

The implications of this complicated and conflicting evidence are many and various. The history of the *quadruplex sensus* in the Middle Ages has perhaps suffered from too narrowly exclusive an approach, having been hampered by positivistic questions like ‘does this particular reading constitute a literal or allegorical sense?’ and ‘is this particular exegete a literalist or an allegorizer?’ Much of the available material is not ultimately responsive to this sort of ‘either/or’ treatment; medieval Biblical exegesis was a lot more sophisticated

⁴¹ Cf. *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, p. 108.

⁴² Bersuire, a Benedictine monk, died in 1362. On the composition of his *Reductorium* see Minnis and Scott, pp. 317–8.

than that—which is to say that it was a lot more flexible and full of contestation than some have allowed. Thus I have, I hope, been able to demonstrate that the discourse relating to the four senses of Scripture was not reducible to, and not altogether compatible with, the one relating to the various Scriptural modes (preceptive, historical, narrative, exemplifying, exhorting, orative, prophetic, etc.). This is hardly surprising, given their different origins and agendas.

As far as the *sensūs Scripturae* themselves are concerned, it is helpful, I believe, to work on the assumption that, in numerous contexts, they became subjected to the requirements (whether real or supposed) of different audiences, and the demands of the different professionals who had to cater for those audiences. Bible scholars seem to have been fully prepared to offer one type of exegesis in one place and another type in another. In a manner of speaking, then, both de Lubac and Smalley were right—or, better, they had seen disparate aspects of a complicated cultural situation which does not easily (if at all) lend itself to positivistic solution. In many cases what mattered crucially was not whether the Bible *should* be interpreted in this way or that but rather such pragmatic considerations as the specific didactic purpose of the given treatise and the perceived nature and needs of its target-audience. Different types of hermeneutics came to be regarded as appropriate to different types of people and/or on different types of occasion. The issue of the proliferation of hermeneutic discourses and the relative status of the various *sensūs* was resolved not intellectually, in some profound *quaestio*, but experientially, in suiting the text and technique to the auditor. Perhaps here may be found the ultimate victory of *modus* over *sensus*.

PART TWO

THE LATE
MIDDLE AGES
TO THE
MODERN PERIOD

**PRESENT PERSPECTIVES:
THE LATE MIDDLE AGES TO THE MODERN PERIOD**

Jon Whitman

- C. *Late medieval and Renaissance sign systems:*
 ‘grammars’ of transformation
 - i. *Kabbalistic codes*
 - ii. *Mythographic programs*
 - iii. *Hieroglyphic formulations*
 - iv. *Emblematic transactions*

- D. *Eighteenth- to twentieth-century theories of allegory:*
 ‘temporalities’ of discourse
 - v. *Eighteenth-century conceptions of mythology*
 - vi. *Romantic approaches to ‘allegory,’ ‘symbol,’ and mythology*
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The ‘Key to all Mythologies’—so reads the working title of the unfinished nineteenth-century interpretive project undertaken by George Eliot’s hapless scholar Mr. Casaubon. Though Casaubon is an imagined character, in a sense both his project and his name have a ‘history’ of their own. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the imposing humanist scholar Isaac Casaubon exploded one of the longest-lasting mythologies of Christian Europe, a belief that had promoted allegorical interpretation for over a thousand years. According to that mythology, the teachings of an ancient Egyptian sage named Hermes survived in an exotic group of ‘Hermetic’ writings that not only chronologically preceded, but conceptually prefigured, Christian belief. In a rigorous critique, the Renaissance scholar argued that both in substance and in style there was evidence that important parts of the *Hermetica* were late compositions, projected backward to appear as if they were primal expressions of a universal wisdom. Casaubon’s textual and contextual investigation is frequently considered

a significant turning point in the movement toward a 'modern' approach to philology and a 'modern' sense of history.¹ It is hard to know how he would have assessed the plight of Eliot's later philological historian Casaubon, with his fatally labyrinthine search for a universal interpretive code, or how he would have viewed the destiny of the interpretively preoccupied 'Casaubon' imagined still later, near the end of the twentieth century, by a contemporary semiologist.² In recent years, however, it is often argued that every movement which explodes mythologies produces new ones in turn, and that post-medieval hermeneutics, no less than pre-medieval *Hermetica*, implies allegories of its own.³

Such an argument differs at least in emphasis from earlier critical attitudes, which frequently tended to treat the history of interpretive allegory since the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance as the history of its gradual displacement.⁴ It should be stressed that distinctions between the two approaches are not absolute, either in time or in orientation. The notion that interpretive allegory is gradually displaced appears also in the current generation, and the rival notion that allegory is continually redeployed depends in part on a definition of 'allegory' that includes interpretive movements categorized differently in the earlier approach.⁵ Yet it remains the case

¹ For the principles of annotation in this chapter (as in chapters 1 and 2), including references to times of publication and 'prior versions' of recent studies, see the introductory note to 'Works Cited' at the end of chapter 1. For Isaac Casaubon and 'modern' attitudes toward philology and history, see, e.g., Burke 1969, pp. 62–3, and Yates 1964, pp. 398–403.

² See the problems of the character 'Casaubon' in Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*, discussed in Eco 1992c, pp. 81–2, and Rorty 1992, pp. 89–96.

³ Among many examples of the argument, see Bruns 1992, p. 15, calling Michel Foucault (with his 'archeology of knowledge') 'one of the great allegorists in the history of interpretation.'

⁴ See the retrospective outline above in chapter 1 (ii), points 5–10. Even apparent revaluations late in the last period discussed in that outline (point 10) remain limited. A critic like Frye, for example, who concentrates on literary allegory, finds 'valid enough in its own right' the Romantic distinction between a "concrete" approach to symbols' and an "abstract" approach which begins with the idea,' and comments that as literature turns toward the 'anti-allegorical,' the 'modern critic begins to feel more at home,' since in the 'modern literal view of art' the poem is 'withdrawn from explicit statement' (Frye 1957, pp. 89–91). On Romantic tendencies in Frye's approach to the 'literal' and the 'allegorical,' see chapter 1 (iii) above.

⁵ For the notion of allegory's displacement, see, e.g., Allen 1970, pp. 238–47, 300–11, and Murrin 1980, pp. 173–96; compare the revealing shifts in Murrin 1969, where allegory (in this case treated primarily in its compositional form) is 'rapidly dying' in the early seventeenth century (p. 196), is 'revived' in the Romantic period (p. 199), and 'never really dies' in retrospect (p. 212). On changing definitions

that over a generation ago it was common to make a sharper distinction than it is at present between 'allegorical' forms of interpretation that flourished in antiquity and the Middle Ages and 'enlightened' forms of interpretation that acquire increasing authority from the late medieval to the modern periods. The critical attitudes over a generation ago described in chapter 1—allegorical interpretation as 'imposed,' 'abstract,' 'closed,' and 'ahistorical'—were not, after all, only critiques of allegory. They were in effect claims that other interpretive methods (such as certain methods in the 'modern' age itself) were textually sensitive, critically specific, imaginatively open, and keenly historical, by contrast.

In chapter 1 I indicated briefly how this contrast has come to seem less sharp in the current generation, and in chapter 2 I concentrated on some of the ways in which contemporary scholarship has qualified the opening features of the contrast—the notions of allegory as 'imposed' and 'abstract'—with particular reference to antiquity and the Middle Ages. In this chapter I would like to concentrate on some of the implications of recent research for the remaining features of the contrast—the notions of allegory as 'closed' and 'ahistorical'—with particular reference to developments from the late Middle Ages to the modern period. As in chapter 2, my discussion is divided according to subjects treated in the individual essays within each of the corresponding parts of this volume. As in the case of that chapter, my comments in these sections, each of which is limited to a couple of extended 'paragraphs,' are designed only to engage and evaluate selected contemporary perspectives on these subjects. They omit much that I would have wished to explore, and they do not aim to survey either the individual essays themselves or general scholarship in the field. Given the fate of Casaubon, I feel it a little unwise to propose a 'key' to even one anthology, let alone to all mythologies.

C. Late medieval and Renaissance sign systems: 'grammars' of transformation

Reductive, rigid, prescriptive—interpretive allegory, it has long been argued, tends to close the range of interpretive possibilities in a text.

of 'allegory' as an interpretive and historical problem, see chapter 1 above; the discussion in sections v–viii of this chapter; Whitman 1987a, pp. 263–72; and Whitman 1991 and 1993.

It is easy to cite cases of allegorical interpretation constricted by programs of ideological transfer, and even in the current generation it remains possible to find critical discussions that pointedly associate such constriction of meaning with allegorical interpretation as a whole.⁶ A more cautious approach, however, distinguishes much contemporary reflection on allegory. This is not only because of the contemporary tendency to argue that forms of interpretation not formerly considered 'allegorical' also exhibit controlling ideologies of their own. It is also because of a converse tendency, an increasing sense that even radically allegorical forms of interpretation which treat elements of a text as 'codified' signs can develop those signs into remarkably versatile systems. Allegorical flexibility of this kind involves not only redesigning the 'units' of a text or diversifying the 'textures' of interpretation, as in the ancient and medieval examples discussed in chapter 2. It involves composing the elements of a text into critical languages with their own creative potential.

A case in point is the development of such languages from the late Middle Ages to the Renaissance—languages not only of words, but of things. By the end of this period, interpreters are seeking not just to delineate the signs of nature, but to investigate its 'alphabet,' even the 'orthography' and 'syntax' of its 'grammar.'⁷ Ancient and medieval readers of the 'book' of nature had long sought to clarify and codify that 'text,' but such later readers increasingly aim to re-compose, revise, and reform it.⁸ In this drive for reconstruction, they tend to transfigure in radical terms the very commonplaces of allegorical interpretation. To Augustine in late antiquity, for example, the New Testament injunction to be 'wise as serpents' (Matthew 10:16) evokes the need for alert spiritual behavior; to Francis Bacon

⁶ See, e.g., Quilligan 1981, pp. 25–33, 224–45, 280–1, treating *allegoresis* as a way for critics to make a text 'fit their own current concerns' (p. 281), and van Dyke 1985, pp. 44–5, 69–70, 203, calling *allegoresis* a 'method of suppressing meaning' (p. 45).

⁷ See Francis Bacon on the 'alphabet' of the 'volume of Creation,' and Robert Hooke on the '*Orthography, Etymologie, Syntaxis* and *Prosodia* of Nature's Grammar,' cited in Ormsby-Lennon 1988, pp. 326–7.

⁸ For ancient and medieval approaches to the world as a 'book,' see, e.g., Curtius 1953 (prior version 1948), esp. pp. 310–32; Chenu 1968 (prior version 1957), pp. 99–145; Alford 1982; Ziolkowski 1985; Whitman 1987a, esp. pp. 122–31, 159–60, 222, 237. Already in his twelfth-century allegory the *Complaint of Nature*, Alan of Lille elaborately argues that the 'grammar' of fallen nature needs reform, but he conceives reform more in ethical and spiritual terms than in experimental and 'scientific' ones; see Whitman 1987b with the references in the notes.

in the late sixteenth century, the same New Testament verse endorses the enterprise of natural science.⁹ In Augustine's view, the divinely authorized transfer of Egyptian gold to the Israelites in Exodus suggests the legitimate use of pagan wisdom for Christian purposes; for Johannes Kepler in the early seventeenth century, the claim 'I have stolen the golden vessels of the Egyptians' introduces his account of his third law of planetary motion.¹⁰ For the theologian Hugh of St. Victor in the Middle Ages, the notion that the world is like a 'book written by the finger of God' suggests a sacramental mystery; for the alchemist Oswald Croll, active in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the argument that 'every creature is a book of God,' whose divine 'finger' imprints 'Natural Signatures' in the world, implies a practical program of experimentation.¹¹ Sometimes the drive to discover and deploy the primal codes of phenomena converges with the dream of recovering the primal words of Adam, and it is not always possible in this period to separate the far-reaching inquiry into natural signification from the investigation of scriptural, Kabbalistic, or hieroglyphic expression.¹² In fact, research in recent decades has repeatedly suggested that not only Renaissance 'scientists' but also 'occultists' contribute significantly to opening up the prospect of a new world, ranging from the description of the solar system to the development of statistical inference.¹³ But for the purposes of this discussion the issue is not which semiotic approaches appear finally to be 'correct'; it can be argued, after all, that modern interpretations of both nature and Scripture tend to be 'closed' to options widely entertained several centuries ago. The issue is rather how interpreters from the late Middle Ages to the Renaissance repeatedly deploy verbal, pictorial, and natural signs in dynamically changing structures of significance.

⁹ For Augustine, see Whitman 1987a, pp. 79–81; for Bacon, see Stephens 1975, pp. 158–9. Augustine's own encouragement of the knowledge of 'things' in his account acquires a substantially different tone, emphasis, and scope in Bacon's empirical program; compare Elsky 1984.

¹⁰ For Egyptian gold, see Exodus 3:21–2, 11:2–3, 12:35–6. For Augustine, see *On Christian Doctrine* II, 40. For Kepler, see Gillispie 1960, pp. 38–9; compare Heninger, Jr. 1974, pp. 107–13, on Kepler's attraction to both 'mystical' and other models of mathematical inquiry.

¹¹ For Hugh's statement and related twelfth-century comments by Bernard Silvestris and Alan of Lille, see Chenu 1968 (prior version 1957), p. 117; for Croll, see Ormsby-Lennon 1988, p. 318.

¹² See Ormsby-Lennon 1988.

¹³ See, e.g., Yates 1967; Hacking 1975, pp. 28–48; Merkel and Debus 1988; Eco 1992b, p. 34.

i. Kabbalistic codes: the syntax of divine names

A radical expression of such interpretive dynamism is the development of late medieval Kabbalah. Whereas earlier, midrashic forms of Jewish commentary had long reworked the verses and words of Scripture into modulating patterns of significance,¹⁴ by the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries Kabbalistic interpretation is constructing a comprehensive new lexicon and syntax for the sacred text—altering previous frameworks of meaning, aligning scriptural terms and phrases with esoteric master codes, projecting images and characters onto a nearly independent operational foreground, and making the reconstituted design of Scripture an index to the very structure of the universe.¹⁵ In one of its major forms, this interpretive movement seeks to coordinate the inner meaning of the scriptural text with the inner workings of the divine realm itself, the interacting spheres (*Sefirot*) of God's mysterious life. Even the most seemingly pragmatic terms in Scripture, like the masculine and feminine Hebrew forms of the demonstrative 'this' (*zeh* and *zot*), come to signify by fluid interpretive association the 'masculine' and 'feminine' spheres of 'Foundation' (*Yesod*) and 'Kingdom' (*Malkhut*) that jointly promote the order of the cosmos.¹⁶ More broadly, the entire text of Scripture is conceived as a configuration of the various manifestations or 'names' of God, even as a vast mystical inscription of his primal Name—the deep structure of which lies hidden beneath the surface grammar (including the apparent word-forms) of the text. From this perspective, the interpreter needs to reorient the very letters of the text (e.g., revising the conventional vocalization of consonants, rearranging a word by anagrammatic techniques, reorganizing a set of words by combining

¹⁴ See chapter 2 (iii) above.

¹⁵ Accounts of this shift from midrashic to Kabbalistic interpretation appear in Dan 1986; Idel 1986 and 1993; Roitman 1986; E.R. Wolfson 1987; Gruenwald 1989; and work in progress by Maurizio Mottolèse.

¹⁶ On inner meaning of Scripture / inner life of God, see Matt 1993, p. 186. On the *Sefirot* and terms such as *zeh* and *zot*, see Scholem 1954 (prior version 1941), pp. 206–17, with pp. 399–400, n. 14, and Roitman 1986, arguing that 'despite the principle of a one-to-one correspondence between a word and its "translation," the semiotic network functioning here admits further possible programmations,' so that the 'language of higher truths' remains 'open, in perpetual mutation' (p. 167). Compare Idel 1986, pp. 151–2, indicating increasing 'fluctuation' in the relationship between word and *Sefirah* by the late thirteenth century, with multiple interpretations of the same word furthering the sense of Torah as 'an "opera aperta" par excellence'; for a more detailed account of multivalent reading, see Idel 1988a, pp. 210–18.

their first or last letters, revaluing whole passages by comparing the numerical values of their Hebrew characters) in order to reveal the spiritual principles and tensions underlying the cosmos.¹⁷ For the late thirteenth-century Kabbalist who intensively develops such methods, Abraham Abulafia, the story of Israel's emancipation from 'Egypt' (*Mizrayim*) signifies the individual's liberation from the 'inclinations' (*yezarim*); the deliverance from 'Pharaoh' (*Par'oh*) indicates an escape from the 'earthly' element (*he-'afar*).¹⁸ The combination of the first and last letters in a famous verse from the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:3) produces encoded terms for the 'active intellect' (*ishim*) and 'divine Providence' (*hashgahah*); the combined numerical value of those terms (682) equals that of the phrase 'a name within a name' (*shem be-shem*, numerically 682). The interpreter thus turns the Song of the Sea verse into a self-referring proof-text for his own act of reconstructing the 'names' of God—while he aims in that very activity to approach an intellectual condition which 'activates' divine Providence.¹⁹ Even for Kabbalistic commentators less provocative in style, a meticulously detailed attention to the linguistic units of the sacred text tends to intersect with a strikingly expansive account of its meaning.²⁰ The text of Scripture is intricately 'woven' from the name of God, writes Joseph Gikatilla in the late thirteenth century.²¹ Such Kabbalistic notions of the 'texture' of the work by which the world is designed tend to give the human explicator a more critical role in recomposing the divine 'weaving' (*arigah*) than Neoplatonic notions of a cosmos programmatically 'woven and unwoven' ('*texit et retexit*').²²

¹⁷ On Scripture as an inscription of the 'names' or Name of God and on variations in the concept of reorienting scriptural letters, see Scholem 1965 (prior version 1956), esp. pp. 37–44, 71–7, 84–5; Scholem 1972a and 1972b; Idel 1986; and Idel 1988a, esp. pp. 97–103, 207–16, 235–8. On the subject at large, see Moshe Idel's essay in chapter 13 of this volume.

¹⁸ A Kabbalist might wish to note that the term *he-'afar* is perfectly anagrammatic with *Phar'oh* [*Par'oh*] in the 'foundational' language of Hebrew, but only partially so in a 'secondary' language like English.

¹⁹ On the foundational status of Hebrew for Abulafia and his own linguistic approaches to Scripture, including the interpretations of Exodus cited here, see Idel 1989, esp. pp. 1–28, 67–73, 97–104.

²⁰ On some implications of this intersection, see Idel 1995; compare Matt 1993, esp. pp. 200–07, and E.R. Wolfson 1993a.

²¹ See Scholem 1965b (prior version 1956), pp. 42–3, with 73–4, and Scholem 1972b, pp. 179–82.

²² On this Neoplatonic notion, see chapter 2 (vii) above, with nn. 70–3. On 'textures' of 'explication' and 'complication' in later interpretation, see my remarks below in nn. 96 and 122.

'You create the words,' declares Abulafia; at the highest level, he argues, interpreters produce 'a new universe.'²³ In effect, Kabbalah opens to commentators the panoramic prospect of unfolding not only the original script of Revelation, but the primal drama of Creation itself.²⁴ From the late medieval to the modern period, that prospect repeatedly promotes 'redemptive,' revolutionary movements not only in interpretive activity, but in ideological and communal history.²⁵

How that interpretive activity should be defined in the contemporary period remains controversial. Well before the middle of the twentieth century, the preeminent scholar of Kabbalah, Gershom Scholem, adopted a Romantic contrast between 'allegory' and 'symbol'²⁶ to try to distinguish between the interpretive designs of 'philosophers' and the interpretive designs of 'mystics' like the Kabbalists. According to this distinction, 1) the 'allegorical' signs of philosophers are connected only contingently to the 'abstractions' that they signify; 2) once the act of signification is achieved, the signs themselves are dispensable; and 3) the abstractions in their own right are framed by the 'limits of language and expression.' By contrast, the argument proceeds, though mystics like the Kabbalists repeatedly deploy allegory, they give their primary attention to 'symbols.' Unlike allegorical signs, 1) 'symbols' are intrinsic facets of the realities that they reveal; 2) they remain indispensable to the very possibility of revelation itself; and 3) the realities in their own right are 'inexpressible' conditions, understood only intuitively through their symbols.²⁷ Since Scholem's extended, influential articulation of the argument in the 1940s, both the theoretical and practical aspects of the Romantic distinction in general have become subjects of deepening doubt.²⁸

²³ For these declarations, see Idel 1989, p. 103.

²⁴ See Scholem 1965b (prior version 1956), pp. 35–6; Idel 1989, pp. 106–09, 122–4.

²⁵ For overviews of such revolutionary drives, from 'Christian Kabbalah' to Sabbatianism and Hasidism, see, e.g., Yates 1964, pp. 84–116, 139–40, 145–51, 267–70, 422–6; Friedman 1983, pp. 71–98; Scholem 1954 (prior version 1941), pp. 244–350; Scholem 1965b (prior version 1956), pp. 35–6, 66–86; Katz 1987.

²⁶ On this distinction, see below in this chapter, sections vi–viii.

²⁷ For these points, see Scholem 1954 (prior version 1941), pp. 25–8, but as Dan 1987, pp. 162–4, indicates, the general argument regularly marks Scholem's approach. For the Romantic background of each of these points, see Todorov 1982 (prior version 1977), pp. 147–221.

²⁸ See sections vi–viii of this chapter, with the references in the notes. The history of the 'symbol' has its ironies; an important influence in the turn away from the Romantic argument is the work of Walter Benjamin, to whose memory Scholem dedicated the very book, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1954, prior version 1941), in which he nearly canonized the Romantic distinction for Kabbalah. Compare

Though in various degrees the argument still marks important treatments of Kabbalah, from a range of recent perspectives the categories by which it operates increasingly seem inadequate to the subject. First, the criteria for distinguishing the merely contingent 'signs' of 'allegory' from the fundamentally intrinsic 'symbols' of Kabbalah are problematic. The lines of argument are complicated not only by Kabbalistic lists of hundreds of 'symbols,' some of which are elusively multivalent,²⁹ but also by celebrated Kabbalistic figures like the comparison of Torah to an attractive, enigmatic 'maiden,' or the elaborate allusion to its 'garments'³⁰—images central, for example, to the 'allegorical' description of the lady Nature in Alan of Lille's twelfth-century *Complaint of Nature* and to a variety of 'allegorical' figurations before and after it.³¹ Second, the notion that allegory necessarily implies the dispensability of signs appears to need considerable qualification with regard to the very philosophers to whom Scholem principally refers, medieval Jewish philosophers interpreting Scripture. For while there are important cases in which such commentators dismiss the initial reference points of scriptural expressions (e.g., anthropomorphic idioms for God) or larger passages, it has been argued that in their interpretive work as a whole medieval

Benjamin 1977 (prior version 1928), pp. 159–235, and the essay of Rainer Nägele in chapter 19 below.

²⁹ On the development of such lists, see Idel 1988a, pp. 210–18; compare p. 231: 'the more polysemous the nature of the symbol, the less organic is its affinity to the symbolized.' On the problem of dividing 'allegorical' figures from 'symbolic' ones, see also pp. 43–4, 219, on the 'kiss' that is apparently affiliated with both 'philosophic' and Kabbalistic figuration; pp. 147–53, 207, on the question of whether the 'psychological' relocation of the *Sefirot* in the individual is or is not 'allegorical'; and pp. 220–1, on the suggestion that the displacement of one 'abstract' reference point (the philosophic 'steresis') by another (the Kabbalistic *efes*) implies an 'allegorization' rather than a 'symbolization.' Compare Schweid 1985 (prior version 1983), pp. 43–4, 126–8, arguing that in much Kabbalistic interpretation, the 'symbolic dictionary' of Kabbalah 'was put to use in a distinctly allegorical way,' that 'the kabbalists' use of allegory is often mechanistic,' and that both Kabbalistic interpretation and 'philosophic allegory' involve a 'conceptual network that mediates' between the initial reference point and the significance assigned to it (pp. 126–7).

³⁰ For these figures, see Scholem 1965b (prior version 1956), pp. 54–5, 64–73.

³¹ On such images in the *Complaint*, which recall works by Macrobius and Boethius and anticipate works by Chaucer and Spenser, see, e.g., Quilligan 1981 and Whitman 1987b; on their extensive background in allegorical theory, see Pépin 1987, chapter 5 (prior version 1958), pp. 98–101, 117–23, 128–31, and chapter 6 (prior version 1954), pp. 137–65. Indeed, it could be argued that given the deep medieval interest in *ornatus mundi* (the cosmic adornment / figurative articulation of the world), a clothed, speaking lady is to many medieval readers an image more conspicuously suggestive of Nature than it is of Scripture.

Jewish philosophers tend to preserve a role for the 'plain sense' (*peshat*) of the sacred text, largely endorsing the broad historical authority of the biblical narrative they interpret and regularly stressing the need to practice the ritual commandments (*mizvot*) they allegorize.³² Finally, the claim that allegory signifies only what is within the 'limits of language and expression' not only appears to leave aside the views of philosophers from ancient Alexandrians to late medieval scholastics that what they call 'allegory' evokes inexpressible, supernal mysteries. In view of contemporary research, it also seems to underestimate the degree to which Kabbalah itself uses philosophic allegory to evoke psychological processes of ecstatic ascent too breathlessly dynamic to be limited by linguistic reference points.³³ In recent years the work of Moshe Idel in particular has emphasized the integral relation between 'systems' of thought in Kabbalah and the thinker's own changing consciousness, and in chapter 13 of this volume he discusses some of the ways in which Kabbalistic writing incorporates philosophic frameworks within dramatic visionary acts—even 're-encoding' scriptural language in new, creative narratives that require allegorical interpretation in their own right. From this per-

³² See, e.g., Heinemann 1981 (prior version 1950–1), discussing the value of 'literal meaning' for various philosophers and stressing the difference between radical 'reinterpretation' (with which he particularly associates Maimonides at times) and flexible 'multiple interpretation'; Talmadge 1986, esp. pp. 337–44, criticizing the 'allegory'/'symbol' distinction with reference to Jewish philosophic allegory and commenting (p. 341) about charges of departures from *halakhic* observance during the 'Maimonidean controversy of the thirteenth century': 'we have virtually no evidence that these charges had any validity'; and Hayoun 1992, pp. 30–4, stating that in general Jewish writers argued for 'an allegorical exegesis that did not place in danger the positive aspect of the religion' and citing one of the most controversial allegorists at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Levi ben Abraham ben Hayyim, on the need to interpret the law according to *halakhah*. Compare the diverse interpretive approaches discussed above by Warren Zev Harvey and Gregg Stern in chapters 8 and 9 of this volume. From a different direction, it has been argued that Scholem tends to devalue the role of *peshat* even in 'mystical' interpretation; see E.R. Wolfson 1993a, pp. 156–7.

³³ See the Kabbalistic treatments of psychological change considered by Idel 1988a, pp. 200–49, esp. pp. 232–49; Idel 1988b, pp. 113–45; and Idel 1989; compare E.R. Wolfson 1993b. From a different perspective, it can be argued, as Idel does, that the 'inexpressibility' stressed in Scholem's account is not central to Kabbalah—that not only do Kabbalists (including 'ecstatic' ones) consider language 'adequate' to convey their 'mystical feeling,' but that 'theosophic' Kabbalists emphasize less the 'inexpressibility' of the divine realm than its 'dynamism'; see Idel 1988a, pp. 202, 206, 219, 223, 231–2. On this issue a strict dichotomy seems less useful than a clarification of what is and is not 'expressed' by a particular Kabbalistic expression. Compare Idel 1988a, pp. 203, 214, 241, and 246–9, with 235–6 on the need to 'break the structured language.'

spective, the codes of Kabbalah, far from closing the possibilities of interpretation, keep disclosing for interpreters new possibilities of meaning and mind. Perhaps Kabbalah also does something more modest in scope. It confronts modern commentators (whether or not Kabbalistically inclined) with the limits of their own presuppositions about what the spiritual 'syntax' of a text of God might be.

ii. Mythographic programs: the structures of ancient fables

Could there be an underlying structure for multiple texts about multiple gods? Even the attempt to give a single mythological text like the *Iliad* a comprehensive allegorical significance had developed only tenuously by the end of antiquity.³⁴ Over the course of the Middle Ages Christian interpreters increasingly offer allegorical commentaries on complete individual works, ranging from Fulgentius's brief analysis of the *Aeneid* as a sequential account of the 'complete state of man' (turn of the fifth and sixth centuries) to the elaborate, book-by-book exposés of the *Metamorphoses* in the 'Moralized Ovid's' of the fourteenth century. Yet movements to organize the range of Greek and Roman mythology as a whole into coherent frameworks, like the diverse treatises of the 'Vatican Mythographers' from the early Middle Ages to the twelfth century, remain conspicuously limited in method and scope.³⁵ The first genuinely systematic effort to transform the bewildering array of ancient fables into a continuous order of discourse appears only at the turn of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, in Boccaccio's late fourteenth-century *Genealogies of the Gentile Gods*, a work comprising over 800 pages in its modern edition.³⁶ Far more 'scientifically' than his predecessors, Boccaccio restructures ancient mythological narrative into a vast, composite 'history,' organized along genealogical lines. He splits apart and splices together the passages of separate tales, redistributes characters according to

³⁴ See my discussion above in chapter 2 (i).

³⁵ For Fulgentius's account of 'plenum hominis . . . statum,' see Whitman 1987a, pp. 107–12; for overviews of the expansive medieval movement to allegorize the *Metamorphoses*, see Allen 1970, esp. pp. 163–73; Hexter 1989; and Reynolds 1990. On the three 'Vatican Mythographers,' the latest of whom is more careful in organization, more distinctly allegorical in orientation, and much wider in influence than the others, see Allen 1970, pp. 166–7, n. 9, and Chance 1994, pp. 181–204, 301–46.

³⁶ On the systematic program of the *Genealogies*, see C.C. Coulter 1923, pp. 322–3; Osgood 1956 (prior version 1930), pp. xii, xxv; Hyde 1986, pp. 90–1. For its modern edition, see the two-volume presentation of Boccaccio's work (1951) by Romano.

their respective lineages, and rigorously diagrams those lineages in a detailed series of inverted genealogical 'trees,' each branching out from the mythological figure at its source.³⁷ Yet at the same time that Boccaccio gives mythological discourse at large the autonomy of a coherent 'history,' he stresses its construction as a doubly invented 'story'—originally fashioned to express the human and cosmic conditions that underlie the antique fables, and retrospectively fashioned by the interpreter himself as he seeks with some surmise to 'figure out' that original design.³⁸ In chapter 14 of this volume, Giuseppe Mazzotta examines this critical interaction between historical inquiry and imaginative projection in Boccaccio's work. In a sense, the central importance of the *Genealogies* for the Renaissance perhaps lies less in its particular genealogical model, which later mythographers adopt only in part, than in this acute feeling for both the authenticity and the artfulness of myth. By the late Renaissance, the study of mythology produces almost simultaneously Giralaldi's ethnographic *Historia* (1548), which seeks to situate the gods in ancient cultic and philological conditions, and Cartari's iconographic *Imagini* (1556), which supplies descriptions for the creative use of contemporary artists.³⁹ The increasingly versatile interplay between fabulation and 'fact' in the late sixteenth century not only informs mythographic writing like Natale Conti's influential *Mythologiae*, with its intricate transactions between the nuances of a story and the 'semantics' of the narrative.⁴⁰ It also distinguishes new mythological poetry like

³⁷ On the genealogical reorganization of mythology, see Hyde 1985 and Hyde 1986, pp. 88–92, commenting (p. 92) that Boccaccio hopes 'genealogy will become a kind of grammar, the inflections of a mythological language.' On the genealogical 'trees,' see Wilkins 1927, pp. 15–17 and Plate VII, and on more general relationships between genealogical and ideological structures, see Whitman 1999 with the references in the notes. For a different use of the image of the inverted tree in Kabbalah to evoke divine 'emanation,' along with related treatments of Torah itself as the 'Tree of Life,' see Scholem 1954 (prior version 1941), pp. 214–15; Scholem 1965b (prior version 1956), pp. 46, 56, 68–9; Scholem 1965a (prior version 1949), pp. 91–4, 108, 111.

³⁸ See esp. Hyde 1985, with Osgood 1956 (prior version 1930), pp. xvii–xlix, and Hyde 1986, pp. 88–92. Compare Mazzotta 1993, pp. 102–28, on the tension between history and rhetoric in Petrarch.

³⁹ For overviews of Giralaldi's *De deis gentium varia et multiplex historia* . . . and Cartari's *Imagini de i dei de gli antichi* (the title of which varies in form), see Seznec 1953 (prior version 1940), pp. 229–56; Allen 1970, pp. 223–5, 228–33; and Stocchi 1996.

⁴⁰ On the procedures of Conti's *Mythologiae sive explicationis fabularum libri decem*, see, e.g., Hyde 1986, pp. 107–10, arguing that Conti treats gods as 'poetic signs rather than objects of antique worship or modern imitation' and stressing the importance of 'transference' or 'metaphorical substitution' in his mythography, and Barkan 1986, pp. 204–05, suggesting that in Conti's treatment of the story of Ganymede,

Spenser's *Mutabilitie Cantos*, in which the poet subtly transfigures the external drama of Mutability, with her primeval genealogy ('linage ancient') and her archaic drives, into the deeper, internal modulation of the natural order, and eventually into the retrospective dynamism of his own turning mind.⁴¹ Yet even that 'enlightened' movement from primitive myth to psychological metaphor finally produces its own counterpoint. By the end of the Renaissance, the very Milton who once ceremonially banished the old gods in his 'Nativity Ode' (1629) later keeps recalling their daemonic resonance in *Paradise Lost* (1667)—remaking even the uncanny story of Athena's genealogy from the head of Zeus into the ghastly spectacle of Sin's generation from the mind of Satan. The mythological gods gradually pass into the 'sublime,' sometimes spectral figures that haunt the eighteenth-century literary imagination.⁴²

In retrospect, the example of Milton suggests perhaps the most radical movement to develop a deep structure for mythology—the effort to correlate ancient stories not just with the natural or psychological order, but with the sacred order itself. Research in recent decades has displayed increasing interest in this process. Whereas sixty years ago (1940) Jean Seznec's treatment of the 'survival' of the gods called special attention to the 'breath of paganism' and the return to 'classical form' during a brief period in the Renaissance,⁴³

the 'act of interpretation becomes itself a flight of Ganymede, and the flight of Ganymede a metamorphosis.' For more general overviews of the work and its influence, see Allen 1970, pp. 225–8; Mulryan 1974 and 1981; and the selected translation of Conti (1994) by DiMatteo.

⁴¹ On this movement and some of its persisting tensions, see Berger, Jr. 1968; Nohrnberg 1976, pp. 735–91; Teskey 1996, pp. 168–88 (prior version of essay 1993).

⁴² See Hartman 1970, pp. 283–97 (prior version of essay 1968), esp. 285–90, and 311–36 (prior version of essay 1968), esp. 324–36. On daemonic resonance in *Paradise Lost* and the eighteenth century, the approach of Allen 1970, pp. 289–311, needs considerable reassessment; see, e.g., Hartman's essays and Knapp 1985, who devotes particular attention to the figures of Sin (whose generation is recalled in *Paradise Lost*, Book 2, ll. 746–67) and Death in Milton's poem. On spectral figures, compare the opening of Rainer Nägele's essay in chapter 19 of this volume.

⁴³ See Seznec 1953 (prior version 1940), e.g., pp. 184, 187, 202, 209, 211, 319–23; compare his corresponding tendency to relegate an interpretive system like Boccaccio's *Genealogies* to a largely 'medieval' mentality and to lament the breakdown of 'classical form' in the 'terrifying or baffling allegories' of the late Renaissance (pp. 220–4, 252–6, 277, 285, 287, 319–23). Seznec does explore certain revealing attempts to situate mythological and scriptural figures in a common 'history' (e.g., pp. 11–36, 122–47), but he offers relatively little analysis of efforts to align the underlying structures of secular and sacred writings. Trinkaus 1970, p. 862, n. 6, notes early reservations about Seznec's approach in the work of Eugenio Garin. Wind 1967 (prior version 1958) marks an important effort to explore the rationale of developments largely disdained by Seznec; see, e.g., p. 204 on 'hybrid gods.'

thirty years later the studies of Charles Trinkaus (1970) and Don Cameron Allen (1970) emphasized the extensive drive in Renaissance mythography to coordinate secular and sacred idioms in shared systems of meaning.⁴⁴ An early expression of this movement is the argument that the underlying impulses of pagan mythology are broadly congruent with Christian theology itself. Already in the fourteenth century Boccaccio elaborates the view that ancient poets are 'theologians' who depict multiple gods to express aspects of one God.⁴⁵ Despite opposition to such claims, the argument for a 'poetic theology' expands among fifteenth-century theorists ranging from Landino to Ficino to Fontius, whether the emphasis lies in the divine origins, philosophic designs, or figurative modes 'shared' by secular and sacred texts.⁴⁶ By the early sixteenth century a poet like Vida can turn the critical theory nearly inside-out, creating an epic in which a Christian author uses Virgilian language to invoke the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷ In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century interpretation, the coordinating tendency frequently takes the form of 'philological' arguments that mythological stories originally derive from sacred history; in the process, the 'genealogies of the gentile gods' sometimes turn into 'etymologies.' Moses (set afloat as an infant), who reaches Mount 'Sinai,' becomes the original of Bacchus (set afloat as an infant), who reaches—almost anagrammatically—Mount 'Nysa.'⁴⁸ More broadly, beyond theories of origins, the study of 'correspondences' between scriptural and non-scriptural texts nearly turns into a 'science'; one

⁴⁴ See Trinkaus 1970, esp. pp. 563–71, 613–14, 683–70, and Allen 1970, esp. pp. 21–82, though these works include their own distinctions between 'medieval' and 'enlightened' tendencies in the Renaissance.

⁴⁵ See *Genealogies* 14.13 and 15.8, trans. Osgood 1956 (prior version 1930), pp. 65, 121–3, with my discussion above in chapter 2 (viii). Arguments that ancient poets evoke (with pre-Christian 'limitations' of consciousness) one God appear earlier in Mussato and Petrarch and recur repeatedly in later Renaissance critical theory; see Trinkaus 1970, pp. 689–93, 699–702, 705–07, 713–14, 725; Witt 1977; Greenfield 1981, pp. 81–2, 99, 170–3, 200–01, 286–8. On partial precedents for such arguments in ancient Stoic interpretation, see Greenfield, p. 172, and Whitman 1987a, pp. 31–8.

⁴⁶ See Trinkaus 1970, pp. 683–721; Witt 1977; Greenfield 1981, including pp. 214–36 and 283–307 on Landino, Ficino, and Fontius; Hyde 1986, pp. 92–104.

⁴⁷ See Kallendorf 1995, pp. 58–62.

⁴⁸ For 'Sinai'/'Nysa' in the philology of Hugh Sanford, see Allen 1970, p. 65; compare p. 70, n. 49, for biblical 'Nun' / Greek '*noun*' ('mind') in the work of Edmund Dickinson. On infants afloat and other supposed resemblances between Moses and Bacchus, see pp. 75, 80, 238. For seventeenth- and eighteenth-century doctoral theses arguing that mythological stories derive from scriptural history, see p. 66, n. 43.

late seventeenth-century scholar constructs almost 300 pages of *Parallela sacra et profana* for Genesis alone.⁴⁹ While late medieval commentary had already suggested how the categories of Scripture and 'literature' might overlap with each other, these interpretive approaches help to develop a practical, critical, and literary vocabulary of new composites, a language of 'archetypes' of shared human experience.⁵⁰ It still requires considerable changes (in theology, historiography, methodology, and sensibility) to produce the 'comparative mythology' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to say nothing of the 'myth criticism' and 'comparative literature' of the twentieth century. But such early mythographic movements are already formulating inventive codes with which to redraw the very lines of human history.

iii. Hieroglyphic formulations: the script of the divine order

It seems complicated enough to specify the syntax of the Bible or to delineate the configuration of fables. But there is still another enigmatic script that some commentators aim to decipher. This is the 'sacred writing' of hieroglyphics, regarded already in late antiquity as a cryptic expression of Egyptian wisdom, and intensively analyzed in the Renaissance as a primal method of depicting the order designed by God. The effort to construe and recompose the figures of such a language expands dramatically from the discovery in 1419 of the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollo, a brief 'dictionary' describing fewer than 200 pictograms, to Pierio Valeriano's imposing *Hieroglyphica* of 1556, with its index of some 1400 hieroglyphic categories, each with a variety of subdivisions.⁵¹ The humanist engagement with the subject eventually acquires a host of visual, verbal, and conceptual forms, from Francesco Colonna's fifteenth-century antiquarian romance, riddled with allusively 'hieroglyphic' inscriptions on the monuments of its imaginary landscape, to the exuberant, Hermetically oriented speculations of the seventeenth-century philologist Athanasius Kircher,⁵²

⁴⁹ See Bompert 1689; Allen 1970, p. 34, n. 61, notes a few of its examples.

⁵⁰ On Scripture and 'literature' in the late Middle Ages, see my discussion above in chapter 2 (viii), with the references in the notes. On movements toward the 'collective imagination of mankind,' see Allen 1970, p. 51, with his discussion as a whole.

⁵¹ See Wittkower 1972, esp. pp. 116–17, and Iversen 1961, esp. pp. 70–3.

⁵² For overviews from different perspectives, see, e.g., Giehlow 1915, Iversen 1961, and the essay below by Charles Dempsey in chapter 15 with bibliography.

and the movement reveals an important dimension in allegorical writing. It had long been common in Christian commentary to treat a textual reference to a 'snake,' for example, as capable of diverse significations, from diabolic seduction to prudential behavior.⁵³ But in Renaissance 'hieroglyphics,' the conceptual 'turn' of the snake seems at times palpably embodied, as it were, in the graphic turn of the figure: if pictured circling upon itself with its tail in its mouth, it may mark 'eternity'; if pictured winding about a scepter, it may express wide-ranging rule.⁵⁴ When the seventeenth-century controversialist John Webster calls natural creatures themselves '*Hieroglyphicks*' in the organized 'book' of God, 'living and speaking pictures' that are not 'dead letters' but '*Symbols*,' he exhibits one of many phases of a broad historical movement toward the Romantic effort (once regarded as 'revolutionary') to renounce the 'dead letter' for the 'Symbol,' a 'living part' in 'that Unity, of which it is the representative.'⁵⁵

Since the fundamental work of Karl Giehlow (1915), studies of Renaissance approaches to hieroglyphics have concentrated on subjects ranging from the development of emblematics to the mystique

⁵³ See Whitman 1987a, pp. 79–81, 132.

⁵⁴ On the circling snake and eternity, see Dempsey 1988, p. 354, with the essay of Charles Dempsey below in chapter 15; on the winding snake and rule, see Wittkower 1972, p. 125. It should be stressed that even in these specific postures the 'hieroglyphic' snake is not fixed but flexible in significance; on the circling snake signifying the world, or the year, or time, or a great king, see the references above to Dempsey, with Allen 1970, p. 114; on winding snakes suggesting harmony, see Iversen 1961, pp. 69–70; compare the discussion of the polyvalent snake in Daly 1979b, pp. 52–3, 58, 63, 90, 98, with the brief references near the opening of Peter M. Daly's essay below in chapter 16. Such polyvalence both expands and complicates the argument that a specific hieroglyph is intrinsically related to its meaning—a complication also affecting the Romantic 'symbol'; see, for example, note 29 above in this chapter; Hodgson 1981, esp. pp. 275–6; Wilson 1972; Whitman 1991, esp. p. 172. On hieroglyph and 'symbol,' see the following note, with my discussion below in section vi.

⁵⁵ For the quotations from Webster's *Academiarum Examen; or, The Examination of Academies* (with his italics), see Singer 1989, p. 58, and Ormsby-Lennon 1988, p. 325; compare Ormsby-Lennon's quotation (p. 317) of a seventeenth-century Rosicrucian manifesto on 'Characters and Letters' both incorporated by God in the Bible and imprinted in creation that are the source of a 'new language.' For the Romantic comments, see Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Statesman's Manual* in Coleridge 1972, p. 30, in the context of Coleridge's broader effort to blend the 'book' of creation with the book of Christian Scripture. It remains important to recognize substantial aesthetic and philosophic differences between such overlapping claims (and more broadly between Renaissance attitudes toward 'hieroglyphics' and Romantic theories of the 'symbol'), among them Romantic views of how a 'symbolic' figure 'participates' in that which it expresses; see, e.g., my discussion below in section vi and Whitman 1991, pp. 167–72, with the references in the notes.

of Egyptian antiquity.⁵⁶ In recent decades, however, increasing attention has been devoted to the implications of hieroglyphics for Renaissance (and modern) theories of language itself. From this perspective, hieroglyphics involve far more than a static 'lexicon' of exotic creatures or enigmatic 'characters'; they exhibit some of the modulating principles in the process of signification. It has been increasingly observed, for example, that Renaissance hieroglyphics at times operate not only with discrete icons intuitively perceived in a 'Neoplatonic' manner, but also with a sequence of signs discursively read according to a flexible syntax.⁵⁷ To pass from the notion of 'sacrifice' to God to the notion of 'subjection' to God, for example, the image of an eye (for God) may be shifted from an altar at one point in the sign sequence to the sole of a sandal at another point. The prescripts underlying such versatility have their playful side, as in the case of the sixteenth-century youth who sported on his cap a pearl and a *T* within an image of a sandal sole to indicate that he loved 'Margherita te sola.'⁵⁸ But as Charles Dempsey shows in chapter 15 of this volume, the more complex and diverse grammars of Renaissance hieroglyphics have impressively evocative power. They also participate in a basic controversy about the order of language that involves not only seventeenth-century debates about the problems of a 'natural language' or tensions in the iconic status of 'pattern poems' for a Protestant poet like George Herbert,⁵⁹ but also twentieth-century theories of representation. The early Wittgenstein, for example, arguing that a proposition gives a 'logical picture' of what it represents, pointedly refers to 'hieroglyphic script,' which

⁵⁶ See the bibliography at the end of Charles Dempsey's essay below in chapter 15.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Wittkower 1972, pp. 118, 120; Russell 1986, pp. 234–5; and Dempsey 1988, esp. pp. 346–57; an important early precedent is Wind 1967 (prior version 1958), p. 208, n. 58.

⁵⁸ For the shifting eye, see the sign sequence in Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Polifili*, presented in Dempsey 1988, p. 350, with his discussion, pp. 348–53; for a rendering of the sign sequence as a whole, see Iversen 1961, p. 68. For the sixteenth-century cap, see Dempsey 1988, p. 353. Compare the later, more caustic 'playfulness' of Ben Jonson regarding 'mystick symboles,' 'perplexed allegories,' and 'hieroglyphick,' discussed by Mebane 1989, pp. 159–66, with my discussion below.

⁵⁹ On hieroglyphics and controversies about 'natural language,' 'real characters,' and varying relations among the linguistic, natural, and mental orders, see esp. Singer 1989; see also Castelli 1979, pp. 24–8, and Elsky 1984. On the 'conflict between visual image and verbal meaning' (p. 99) in Herbert's pattern poem 'The Altar' and related problems in other seventeenth-century lyrics, see Cooper 1992.

'depicts' the facts that it 'describes.' By contrast, theorists such as Benjamin, appealing (with repeated citations of Giehlow's work) to hieroglyphic enigmas, and Derrida, calling attention to forms of 'graphic poetics,' stress the problem of specifying a controlling 'logic' in writing.⁶⁰ Perhaps it is part of the ambivalent history of 'hieroglyphics' that even when the figure that is carved out (*glyphē*) is distanced from the sacred (*hieros*), the graven image of 'Egyptian gold' still exerts its fascination.

iv. Emblematic transactions: the interplay of visual and verbal forms

Images, in any case, develop not only in pictorial forms. The ancient question of how visual figures relate to verbal ones acquires an important new dimension in the sixteenth century, with the expansive composition of books in which elaborate forms of *pictura* and *scriptura* gloss one another. Beginning with Andrea Alciato's *Emblematum liber* (1531), such 'emblem' books appear in an extraordinary array of different titles in a multitude of languages from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and a vast number of emblematic designs in more diffused forms, from architecture, painting, and handicraft to dramatic pageantry and poetic artistry, pervade the European imagination during this period.⁶¹ Such a protean phenomenon resists comprehensive definition, but even the subcategory of 'emblem books' suggests something of the emblem's interpretive flexibility. In many cases, for example, the picture does not merely 'illustrate' the text and vice versa; rather, each elucidates and at times qualifies the other.⁶² An image with an inherited meaning may be significantly realigned by

⁶⁰ For the quotations from the early Wittgenstein, see Singer 1989, pp. 68–9, who also notes Wittgenstein's later, differing position. For the approach of Benjamin, see Benjamin 1977 (prior version 1928), e.g., pp. 167–77. For 'irreducibly graphic poetics' and Derrida, see Derrida 1974 (prior version 1967), pp. 91–3, with the remarks of Fineman 1981 (prior version 1980), pp. 29–30 and pp. 52–3, n. 10, on hieroglyphics, 'occulted origins,' and 'picture *versus* word' for Derrida, Freud, and others; Fineman's comments qualify the brief reference to Derrida by Singer 1989, p. 69. Compare the title of the poststructuralist-oriented publication *Glyph* (without *hieros*), along with the closing sentence of this section. On early allegory and the relation between language and *logos*, see the remarks above in chapter 2 (i, vii) and in the essays of Robert Lamberton and Winthrop Wetherbee in chapters 3 and 10.

⁶¹ See the overviews of Daly 1979a, 1979b (with special attention to literature), 1986, and 1988 (with special attention to visual arts and handicraft).

⁶² See, e.g., the discussion and references in Daly 1979a, pp. 22–30, 38, 63, 97–8; Daly 1979b, pp. 38–40, 51–2; Daly 1986, p. 169; Bath 1994, pp. 71, 89, 104–08; my discussion below; and Peter M. Daly's essay in chapter 16.

its new textual setting, as in the celebrated 'hieroglyph' of the dolphin wound around an anchor—deciphered by Horapollo as 'make haste slowly,' but treated politically by Alciato as the 'prince securing the safety of his subjects.'⁶³ Conversely, the apparent sense of a text may be distinctly affected by its pictorial counterpart, as in Otto van Veen's early seventeenth-century emblem on silence in matters of love, with its image of Cupid holding a finger to his mouth—a gesture long associated with an ancient deity enjoining silence regarding cultic mysteries.⁶⁴ In a broader sense, the emblem, with its highly charged imagery and its epigrammatically pointed language, tends to highlight the very question of how visual and verbal perceptions clarify—or complicate—one another. A radical sense of this concern marks the *Emblemes* (1635) of the influential writer Francis Quarles. One of his emblems, for example, visualizes Spirit looking through an 'Optick glass' toward a prospect of the future while Flesh in the foreground conspicuously seeks to distract that figure with an enchanting prism; Spirit's verbal comment, 'Break that fond glasse,' in effect dramatizes the perceptual dilemma of the very viewer engaged with the picturesque emblem itself.⁶⁵ In recent decades more than one discussion of figurative forms related to the emblem has suggested that the dialectic between picture and text in this period has a twentieth-century analogue in the psychoanalytic notion of negotiating between the acutely vivid images of the unconscious and the elucidating language of analysis.⁶⁶

⁶³ See Hoffmann 1989 (prior version 1979), p. 15, with his reference in n. 69 to figs. 52 and 55 in Wind 1967 (prior version 1958). On 'make haste slowly,' see the essay below by Charles Dempsey in chapter 15. On the radical transformation of the picture itself in later editions of Alciato, see Daly 1979a, pp. 85–9; it can be argued that by depicting the anchor upright, those editions help to 'anchor' the image, in turn, in the new 'context' of stability.

⁶⁴ See the discussion of the emblem from *Amorum emblemata* in Daly 1979a, pp. 102–07, with his reference in n. 52 to Wind [1967 (prior version 1958)], p. 12.

⁶⁵ On this dilemma in *Emblemes*, see Gilman 1986, pp. 85–116, esp. pp. 99–102, who argues that more 'radically than other visual allegories,' such configurations 'intend to refocus our sight telescopically from the image before us' to 'the object of thought and meditation beyond the pictorial surface,' and who speaks of the 'tension between the need to see and the perils of sight' in Quarles's emblems. My point is not, of course, that all emblems display the 'iconoclastic' strain in Quarles's work, but that such work exposes in a radical form the kind of heightened visual and verbal self-consciousness that tends to develop with emblematic forms at large.

⁶⁶ See Gombrich 1972 (not in prior version, 1948), pp. 189–90, discussing Freud and Jung; Fineman 1981 (prior version 1980), pp. 45–9 and 52–3, n. 10, discussing Freud, Lacan, and others; Gilman 1986, pp. 114–15 and p. 212, n. 31, citing Ricoeur on Freud. It should be noted that the general argument has limitations,

But the emblematic process of 'elucidation' involves more than the internal relation between *pictura* and *scriptura*. It implies the question of interpretive perspectives toward phenomena at large. Scholarly treatments of the emblem over the course of the twentieth century increasingly engage this question. Whereas early theorists tend either to argue that emblematic figuration operates rather capriciously or to emphasize its quality of ingenuity and wit, by the mid-1960s Albrecht Shöne (1968 [prior version 1964]) and Dietrich Walter Jöns (1966) are stressing the adaptation by emblematic writers of deeply established medieval attitudes toward the signifying powers of the natural world. Shöne's stress on natural signification as potentially 'factual' for the emblemist has in turn been qualified in recent decades by the view that multiple, sometimes conflicting frames of reference—from rhetorical convention to empirical science—underlie the interpretive positions of emblematic writers.⁶⁷ In chapter 16 of this volume, Peter M. Daly discusses such shifting frames of reference and calls attention to some of the changing social contexts that modify the configurations of emblems. From such a viewpoint, the development of emblematic writing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries raises the fundamental question of the conditions under which meaning itself is instituted. Revealingly, in the very period in which both human art and science seem increasingly capable of offering 'objective' observations of the world, intriguing compositions like the emblem dramatize the 'subjective' dimension of that world, its 'clarification' and construction by the human mind.⁶⁸ This is not to suggest that most emblems have so explicitly 'experi-

among them the fact that many emblems lack the kinds of confusion or disorder frequently attributed to unconscious images. On the Freudian concept of 'construction in analysis,' see Rainer Nägele's essay below in chapter 19.

⁶⁷ For these points see the overviews of Daly 1979a; Daly 1979b, pp. 5–6; and Bath 1994, pp. 3–7.

⁶⁸ See Hoffmann 1989 (prior version 1979) and Bormann 1979. With regard to the realm of language, compare Waswo 1987, arguing for the modification of 'referential' semantics by forms of 'relational' and contextual semantics during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; compare Drysdall 1992, pp. 31–2, suggesting such a shift in Renaissance theories of the *impresa* (not, pointedly, the related emblem, though Drysdall in n. 21 suggests the relevance of the argument for the emblem itself). With regard to the 'subject-object problem' in Renaissance thought at large, a classic early study is Cassirer 1963 (prior version 1927), esp. pp. 132–91; it is not necessary to be 'Neo-Kantian' in outlook to emphasize the general problem or to indicate its importance for Renaissance notions of 'finding'/'making' in *inventio*. On the tension between 'recognition' and 'invention' of significance in *inventio*, see Bath 1994, pp. 152–9.

ential' a context as the one Nicolaus Taurellus claims for his late sixteenth-century emblem of heady arrogance, pictured as an empty ear of corn reaching skyward while ears dense with corn incline earthward—an emblem traced by the author himself to a personal walk through a cornfield.⁶⁹ But emblematic writing at large—artfully shaping significance by the variable interplay between picture and text, and meticulously depicting objects while expressively manipulating them—finally suggests not only the invention of a new 'language,' but also the articulation of a new world.

* * *

The 'grammars' of transformation in late medieval and Renaissance sign systems deeply alter the notion that interpretive allegory is 'closed' in orientation. As I suggested in chapter 2, a more detailed study might also consider such developments with regard to the notions of 'imposed' analysis and 'abstract' interpretation examined in the earlier chapter. The very question of whether 'units' of analysis are 'imposed,' for example, might be reconceived in view of seventeenth-century theories of hieroglyphics and other languages; it has been argued that what divides such sign systems is sometimes not so much whether the signs themselves are considered 'natural' or 'conventional' as whether the *world* to which the units of language are thought to correspond is divided according to Neoplatonic Ideas (in the case of 'hieroglyphics'), Aristotelian genera and species (in the case of 'real characters'), or the order of sense perception (in the case of 'epistemological' approaches to language).⁷⁰ From such a perspective, a protest against 'imposed' categories of analysis may not necessarily be 'wrong,' but it requires at least a candid act of self-reflection by the protester. Similarly, the notion that interpretive allegory is insistently 'abstract' might be usefully reassessed in view of the intricate

⁶⁹ See the reference to Taurellus's *Emblemata physico-ethica* in Schöne 1968 (prior version 1964), pp. 26–7, and the discussion in Hoffmann 1989 (prior version 1979), esp. pp. 8–11, with his general remarks (pp. 2 and 18) on the 'interaction' in emblematics between 'aesthetic objectification and the human mastery over nature,' on 'the representation of surrounding reality as a means to its interpretation and at the same time as a means of changing it through human manipulation.' The argument is important, though Hoffmann's concept of an 'aesthetically contemplative observation of nature' (p. 9), for example, seems to me to underestimate the strained, sometimes driven quality of many examples of emblematic 'observation.' For a picture of Taurellus's emblem, see Daly 1979b, p. 41.

⁷⁰ See Singer 1989.

pictorial and linguistic 'textures' of emblematics. Even seventeenth-century art works that reduce or remove the explicit verbal 'messages' of their emblematic sources repeatedly encode such messages within their sensuously 'verisimilar' designs.⁷¹

In this discussion, however, I have tried only to suggest some of the interpretive openings offered by late medieval and Renaissance sign systems: the modulating scriptural syntax of late medieval Kabbalah; the imaginative constructs of late medieval and Renaissance mythography; the flexible icons of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century hieroglyphics; and the shifting semantic contexts of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century emblems. Over the course of this period, it sometimes seems as if the interpreter's own changing perspectives repeatedly intervene in the very configuration of the interpreted order. But what if that order is the order of history, the process of temporal change itself? In that case the focal points of interpretive perspective would already be shifting, as it were, in a broad historical movement that includes the act of interpretation itself. Insofar as theorists of allegory engage that process, they enter a dimension in which turns of language, including their own, are inseparable from turns of time.

*D. Eighteenth- to twentieth-century theories of allegory:
'temporalities' of discourse*

To what extent might allegory be engaged with the process of history? Over a generation ago, it was common to regard allegorical interpretation as 'ahistorical' in orientation—transforming the particular characters and episodes of distinct texts into archetypal figures and timeless patterns. An appeal to timeless conditions is a recurrent feature of allegory, and it is understandable that the contrast between 'allegorical' interpretation and 'historical' consciousness continues to appear in much contemporary criticism. It may nonetheless be asked why that contrast often takes such a radical form before critical developments of recent years. Even in the extreme case of ancient mythography, after all, which repeatedly treats mythological stories as fables to be credited only in philosophic terms, there are nonethe-

⁷¹ The general point is a commonplace of contemporary iconography; for a specific application to emblems, see, e.g., Tribe 1992.

less movements with 'historicizing' tendencies. Already in the third century B.C.E., Euhemerus is arguing that stories about the gods originate in political and social history—an argument with an expansive afterlife⁷²—and by the end of antiquity, Neoplatonic interpreters are pointedly seeking to situate mythological subjects (the Cave of the Nymphs, the conflict between Athens and Atlantis) in historical conditions.⁷³ Far more extensively, efforts to deploy allegory to evoke conceptions of history distinguish the interpretation of Scripture from antiquity, ranging from Jewish forms of 'predictive' exegesis (e.g., the four rivers of Eden as the four kingdoms of Babylonia, Media, Greece, and Rome) to the elaborate formulations of Christian 'typology,' which deeply influence Christian historiography itself for centuries.⁷⁴ Yet broad changes not only in the treatment of history, but also in the conception of allegory itself, increasingly dissociate the 'allegorical' from the historical since the Renaissance and the Reformation.⁷⁵ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the investigation of mythological stories gradually (though unevenly) turns toward the study of their linguistic, ethnic, and social contexts. During the same period, the examination of Christian Scripture publicly shifts in Protestant

⁷² On such 'historicist' forms of mythography in antiquity, see Pépin 1976 (prior version 1958), pp. 49–50, 146–52, 310, 366–7, 372, 391, 438–43. On their importance and diversification from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, see, e.g., Seznec 1953 (prior version 1940), esp. pp. 11–36, including pp. 26–8 on 'the insertion of the gods into history' in a fourteenth-century chronicle; Allen 1970; and Manuel 1959, esp. pp. 83–125, including pp. 110–11 on the increasing tendency in the eighteenth century to associate mythological episodes less with supposed historical personalities than with 'the annals of the history of civilization and culture' at large; compare my discussion below.

⁷³ On the role of historical 'authenticity' in Porphyry's approach to the Cave of the Nymphs (*Odyssey* 13) and Proclus's interpretation of the conflict between Athens and Atlantis (*Timaeus* 20d–25d), see Pépin 1987, pp. 60–3, 72 (prior version of essay 1966), and Lamberton 1986, pp. 121–6, 132. For brief remarks on the extent to which Euhemerist and Neoplatonic attitudes qualify conventional claims about the 'ahistorical' orientation of Greek allegory, see Pépin 1976 (not in prior version, 1958), pp. 498–9.

⁷⁴ On forms of 'predictive' reading in early Jewish and sectarian interpretation, see H.A. Wolfson 1970 (prior version 1956), pp. 26–30, 36–9, and Kugel 1986, pp. 34–9, 44–51, 79–81; on early Christian 'typology,' see my discussion with notes in chapter 2 (iv) above and the essay of Paula Fredriksen in chapter 6 of this volume. It has long been recognized that interpretation which has relatively recently been termed 'typology' is normally called in the ancient and medieval Latin tradition *allegoria*; see de Lubac 1947, esp. p. 187, and Charity 1966, esp. p. 171, n. 2; compare Pépin 1976 (not in prior version, 1958), pp. 490–7.

⁷⁵ On these and related changes, only briefly noted in the following remarks, see Whitman 1991, esp. pp. 166–7, with the accompanying annotation, and chapter 1 (ii) above, with my qualifications and discussion below.

circles from a 'fourfold' method of interpretation toward the concept of a single, 'literal' sense. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the notion of critical 'understanding' at large increasingly comes to imply 'philological' and 'historical-critical' research into the origins and development of texts—and eventually to involve 'hermeneutic' inquiries into the conditions of consciousness underlying such texts. In the meantime, and continuing well into the twentieth century, the very definition of 'allegorical' composition frequently tends to be narrowed to the act of deploying abstract agents in imaginative settings. Under such circumstances 'allegory' might seem scarcely capable of much more than dreaming an entrance into the realm of history.

Yet at times during this same broad period, and increasingly in recent decades, critical discussions have suggested that the realms of allegorical and historical writing repeatedly blend into each other. This suggestion develops from more than one point of view. From one perspective, it reflects the increasing sense that 'historicist' investigation includes allegorical dimensions of its own. Among many important examples, the late medieval and Reformation tendency to treat interpretations previously considered 'allegorical' as aspects of the 'literal' sense is a conspicuous case in point.⁷⁶ But the association of 'historicist' interpretation with allegory also takes far more searching forms, including detailed arguments for the imaginatively 'constructed' and ideologically conditioned character of historical writing at large.⁷⁷ From another perspective, the critical study of 'allegorical' composition itself not only extends beyond an emphasis on abstract agents; it also comes to associate 'allegorical' expression with broad disparities in figurative language that it implicates with the problematic disjunctions of time. With an orientation of this kind, the interpretation of texts considered 'allegorical' is not a mere evocation of timeless paradigms, but an exposé of temporal dilemmas.⁷⁸ In effect, such critical developments suggest that while 'history' incorpo-

⁷⁶ See my discussion above in chapter 1 (iii) and the concluding part of chapter 2 (viii) with the references in the notes.

⁷⁷ For diverse forms of such arguments and for related controversies, see, e.g., White 1973; Frei 1974 and 1986; Jameson 1981; Gossman 1990; Copeland and Melville 1991; and my discussion below.

⁷⁸ See my discussion below in this chapter (vi–viii) and the essays of Azade Seyhan, Rainer Nägele, and Tobin Siebers in chapters 18–20 of this volume. On historical dimensions of figurative 'agents' themselves, see, e.g., Kelley 1997.

rates (if often silently) allegorical configurations, 'allegory' exhibits (if often obliquely) historical concerns. To suggest something of these complex changes, it might be useful to consider a number of prominent theories of allegory from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries.

v. Eighteenth-century conceptions of mythology: the modifications of the mind

For all its popularity, the allegorization of ancient mythology is a chronically ambivalent act. To Christian mythographers from late antiquity to the late Renaissance, mythological writing is an antiquated form of falsehood, yet it is nonetheless an abiding source of wisdom. The implicit tension regarding a corpus of texts obsolescent in its 'body' yet enduring in its 'spirit' sometimes acquires conscious expression among mythographers from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries.⁷⁹ With the 'progressivist' movement of the Enlightenment, however, the historical problem of assessing a mythological sensibility of the remote past that nonetheless persists in the present often takes a far more acute form.⁸⁰ From the late seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries, critics from Bernard de Fontenelle to David

⁷⁹ See, e.g., the association of pagan mythology with the 'monstrous' for Boccaccio and Conti, noted in Hyde 1985, pp. 739–41, and the selected translation of Conti (1994) by DiMatteo, pp. xvii, 5, and 15. The tension in such associations is partly due to the fact that unlike a critic such as Giovannino of Mantua, or, already in antiquity, Eusebius—both of whom also associate mythology with the 'monstrous' (on which see Greenfield 1981, p. 89, and Allen 1970, p. 57)—Boccaccio and Conti make expansive claims for the theological or philosophic value of mythological texts. Compare the essay of Giuseppe F. Mazzotta in chapter 14 below on the problem of retrieving the mythological past for Boccaccio and the comments of DiMatteo on Conti's display of a 'growing if still largely tacit sense of the discontinuity between ancient and modern' (pp. xvii–xviii, with the qualifications on pp. xviii–xx). Much Renaissance mythography, of course, tends to elide such distinctions. It would be possible to trace the specific case of the 'monstrous' to delineate subsequent historical change; the critique in the Renaissance of what is regarded as religiously or morally grotesque tends to expand by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries into a critique of what is regarded as socially or culturally barbarous. See, e.g., Fontenelle arguing that as humanity develops it turns from uncouth gods toward more civilized ones (cited by Manuel 1959, p. 45), and see my discussion below.

⁸⁰ On anxiety and fascination in the Enlightenment regarding the persistence of such a 'sensibility'—from the heathen practices of 'primitive' cultures in recently discovered parts of the globe, to the 'phantasms' and 'delusions' of contemporary religious enthusiasts, to the mythological allusions and inventions of 'fancy' in the 'sophisticated' courts and poetry of Europe—see, e.g., Manuel 1959, esp. pp. 15–20, 42–3, 52–3, 74–81, 141–8, 182–3, 188–209, 222–41, 246–8, 305–09; Hartman 1970, pp. 283–97 and 311–36 (prior versions of essays 1968); Engell 1981; Mali 1992, esp. pp. 80–5, 136–49.

Hume to Charles de Brosses increasingly associate mythological forms of expression with a primitive mentality, rudimentary in its corporeal preoccupations and immature in its psychic development. During the same period, the effort to explain the 'significance' of that mentality gradually turns from previous systems of philosophy or theology toward early, programmatic forms of comparative religion, social psychology, ethnology, and anthropology, with the critiques of interpreters from Pierre Bayle to Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger.⁸¹ Perhaps the figure who most strikingly suggests some of the far-reaching shifts in mythographic orientation from the late Renaissance to the early Romantic period is Giambattista Vico, whose evocative *New Science* appears in the early eighteenth century.⁸² As graphically as any of his contemporaries, Vico portrays the 'first men' who founded mythology as 'stupid, insensate, and horrible beasts' ('stupidi, insensati ed orribili bestioni') whose 'minds were not in the least abstract,' because they were 'entirely immersed in the senses' and 'buried in the body' ('seppellite ne' corpi').⁸³ Yet differently from his contemporaries, Vico argues at the same time that those sense-submerged creatures nonetheless exhibited a special form of 'wisdom.' According to Vico, this was not the 'esoteric wisdom' retrospectively projected upon them by subsequent interpreters, but a 'poetic wisdom' by which primordial humans imaginatively constructed their primal world, the origin of later idioms, ideas, and institutions in 'gentile' civilization at large.⁸⁴ Their fables, like the image of a sky bursting with thunder and light-

⁸¹ For these developments Manuel 1959 remains a fundamental study. On the 'rationalist' critique of a 'primitive' mentality, see esp. pp. 10–12, 18–19, 42–6, 132–48, 168–241, 283–4, 305–12. With regard to the development of 'comparative' disciplines, it should be noted that even eighteenth-century interpreters with older styles of allegorization at times turn toward the strategies of early 'social science'; see pp. 250–70.

⁸² Quotations from the *New Science*, originally published in 1725, refer to Vico's revised third edition of 1744 (in the recent edition by Battistini 1999 [prior version 1990]). Translations from Vico's third edition refer to the work of Bergin and Fisch 1968 (prior version 1948). Numbers following citations of the *New Science* refer to the standard paragraph numbers for the third edition.

⁸³ See *New Science* 374 and 378. Vico frequently stresses the point; see, e.g., *New Science* 338, 340, 819.

⁸⁴ On 'poetic wisdom' in contrast to 'esoteric wisdom,' see, e.g., *New Science* 361, 363, 367, 375, 381, 384, and 837. For precedents to Vico's sense of displaced 'esoteric wisdom' in the particular case of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, see Rossi 1969, pp. 81–131; on the importance of hieroglyphics to Vico's conception of primal expression at large, see Cantelli 1976, pp. 50, 57–62. For detailed discussions of Vico's sense of the constitutive function of 'poetic wisdom,' see, e.g., Bidney 1969; Berlin 1976 (prior version 1960); Verene 1981; and Mali 1992.

ning as a vast 'animated body' called 'Jove,' are in Vico's *New Science* 'true narrations' ('vere narrazioni')—accurate embodiments of historic, formative modes of consciousness.⁸⁵ In chapter 17 of this volume, Joseph Mali discusses some of the wide-ranging implications of this argument that mythology is 'true' not by its 'ingenious' correlation with later philosophy and theology, but by its authentic articulation of a foundational way of perceiving and constituting a world. In this regard it is telling that Vico defines 'allegory' itself not as *alieniloquium* but as *diversiloquium*, exhibiting figures that are not 'analogical' in signification but 'univocal'⁸⁶—as when the single quality of valor shared by diverse individuals is embodied in an 'imaginative class concept' like Achilles.⁸⁷ With such a definition the notion of 'allegory' is conspicuously passing beyond the semiology of metaphorical transfer toward the morphology of the developing mind.⁸⁸ Despite

⁸⁵ On the 'animated body' and 'Jove,' see *New Science* 377; compare, e.g., 379 and 402. On fables as 'true narrations,' see *New Science* 408; compare 81, 401, 808, 814, 817, and the discussion of Mali 1992, esp. pp. 3–5, 136–209.

⁸⁶ On 'allegory' as *alieniloquium* in the Middle Ages, see the references above in chapter 1, n. 10. On Vico's redefinition of the term, see *New Science* 403, discussing mythologies as 'allegorie' ('Il qual nome . . . ci venne diffinito "*diversiloquium*"') with figures that have 'a univocal signification' ('una significazione univoca'). Compare *New Science* 34 on 'l'allegorie' containing 'sensi' not 'analoghi ma univoci,' and 210 on 'true poetic allegories' ('vere allegorie poetiche') and '*diversiloquia*.' Perhaps nothing more strikingly displays the momentous shift that 'allegory' is undergoing in such passages than a comparison with Boccaccio, who near the start of his *Genealogies* associates 'allegoria' with the 'other' or 'diverse' ('alienum . . . sive diversum') and then specifies that 'diverse' is to be taken as diverse from the sense that is 'historical or literal' ('diversi ab hystoricali seu licterali [sic] . . . sensu'; see *Genealogie* 1.3 in the edition (1951) of Romano, I, p. 19. For Vico, 'allegory' is itself 'historical'—not only because it refers to historical acts, but also because its very language is 'proper' to the historical conditions in which those acts take form. See *New Science* 846, arguing that 'the historical allegories' contained in the fables are 'proper' to them ('la proprietà dell'allegorie storiche'), with 403, 818, and the references above and below in nn. 85 and 87.

⁸⁷ On 'imaginative class concepts' ('generi fantastici') like Achilles, see *New Science* 403, 809, 934; for a list of passages in the *New Science* discussing 'class concepts' and the related terms 'poetic characters' ('caratteri poetici') and 'imaginative universals' ('universali fantastici'), see Verene 1981, p. 66, n. 3. Vico regards his 'discovery' that the 'first gentile peoples' were necessarily 'poets who spoke in poetic characters' as 'the master key of this Science'; see *New Science* 34. On such figures, see Verene, pp. 65–95, including pp. 75–6: 'the particulars are not thought of *analogically*, as being *like* the ideal portraits of the generic individual of the fable. The individual cannot be thought of as having a reality apart from the generic character; he is what he is only through his identity with it. . . . [T]he particulars are directly conceived as universals.'

⁸⁸ See Berlin 1976 (prior version 1960), p. 48, on Vico's broader notion that 'the development of the morphology of a symbolic system is one with the growth of the

the limits of Vico's own direct influence, by the late eighteenth century the 'sensuous' idiom of primal poetry assumes a creative power far beyond rational thought for critics such as Hamann and Herder,⁸⁹ and by the early nineteenth century the notion of making an individual itself a 'class' deeply informs the Romantic theory of the 'symbol.'⁹⁰

But to understand the realignment of 'allegory' by Vico in its historic context it is necessary to probe beyond his use of the term itself, which is less prominent in the *New Science* than in the work of eighteenth-century interpreters like Thomas Blackwell or Antoine Court de Gébelin who are still attributing 'esoteric wisdom' to the ancients.⁹¹ Perhaps the point can be partially suggested by a brief glance at an interpretive principle central to his approach. When in the Middle Ages the theologian Thomas Aquinas defends the use of metaphorical images in Christian Scripture, he invokes the argument—broadly Aristotelian—that it is natural to attain to 'intellectual truths' through 'sensible things,' because 'all our knowledge

culture of which it is the central organ'; compare Verene 1976, p. 306. The very concept of the 'genealogy' of the gods displays in Vico a revealing shift in emphasis. Unlike Boccaccio, who conceives a genealogy of the gods largely in terms of their relationships *inside* mythological stories, Vico conceives a 'natural theogony, or generation of the gods' ('una teogonia naturale, o sia generazione degli dèi') in terms of the movements of human mind and culture that 'generate' them. See, e.g., *New Science* 7, 317, 392, 734, with Bidney 1969, pp. 70, 74. On the question of the degree to which Vico's approach is or is not specifically 'Euhemeristic,' see Verene 1981, pp. 70–1, with the references on p. 71, n. 19, and Mali 1992, pp. 198–200; it seems to me that the critical point in this regard is to observe the fundamental changes that the very notion of 'historical' interpretation is undergoing in Vico and the eighteenth century.

⁸⁹ On this movement and the role of Hamann and Herder, see Manuel 1959, pp. 281–309, and Wells 1969, whose essay includes a discussion of the recurrently problematic question of Vico's direct influence upon later writers with partially overlapping tendencies.

⁹⁰ See, e.g., Schelling's early nineteenth-century arguments that the artist 'makes the individual a world in itself, a class' ('bildet er das Individuum zu einer Welt für sich, einer Gattung'; Schelling [1856–61 edition], VII, p. 304; trans. Cabot 1913; rpt. Adams 1971, pp. 449–50) and that in 'symbolic' expression, the 'general' and the 'particular' are 'absolutely one' (cited by Todorov 1982 [prior version 1977], p. 208); compare n. 87 above. See also Coleridge's discussion in *The Statesman's Manual* (in Coleridge 1972) of 'symbols' in Christian Scripture, including the argument that in 'the Scriptures' both 'Facts and Persons' necessarily have 'a particular and a universal application' (pp. 29–30); compare my remarks below in section vi of this chapter regarding Coleridge's similarities and differences in orientation. Coleridge does not directly encounter Vico's work until long after *The Statesman's Manual* (1816); on the broad question of influence, see Whalley 1969.

⁹¹ On Blackwell, see Murrin 1980, pp. 179–82, and Engell 1981, esp. pp. 247–8, 255, 257, 265, n. 44, 269; on Court de Gébelin, see Manuel 1959, pp. 250–8.

originates from sense.⁹² When several centuries later the educator John Amos Comenius publishes an illustrated primer for children on the order of the world, he cites a standard form of the same argument: 'Nothing is in the intellect that was not previously in the sense.'⁹³ But when in the eighteenth century that 'new scientist' Giambattista Vico explicitly cites the same basic argument, he uses it not to defend a figurative method in Christian Scripture or a pictorial presentation of cosmic order, nor even primarily to delineate the process of individual perception, but rather to characterize the historical development of the 'human race' in general ('gener umano')—with early poets the 'sense' ('il senso') and later philosophers the 'intellect' ('l'intelletto') of the race.⁹⁴ From such a perspective—shared in part by other critics of the period—it can be argued that the allegory of 'body' and 'spirit' in early mythography is gradually turning into the phenomenology of the history of consciousness at large.⁹⁵ In recent decades it has been suggested that the very structure of the *New Science*—which proceeds from an emblematic frontispiece with 'hieroglyphs' ('geroglifici') suggesting the development of civilization, to the self-conscious explication of that image in the author's

⁹² See *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 9, resp.: 'Est autem naturale homini ut per sensibilia ad intelligibilia veniat: quia omnis nostra cognitio a sensu initium habet' (Thomas 1952, I, p. 8; trans. in Thomas 1945, I, p. 15). On the Aristotelian affiliation of the argument, see the following note, although there is of course a partial overlap with other frameworks, such as Romans 1:20.

⁹³ See the reference to Comenius's *Orbis sensualium pictus* in Bath 1994, pp. 41–2, with the Latin quotation: 'Nihil est in intellectu, quod non prius fuit in sensu.' Compare Aristotle's *De anima* 432a7–9.

⁹⁴ See *New Science* 363, with the citation: 'Nihil est in intellectu quin prius fuerit in sensu.' Compare *New Science* 779.

⁹⁵ For late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century versions of the 'sense'/'intellect' distinction as a framework for human development at large, see the references to Fontenelle, Hume, David Hartley, and others in Manuel 1959, esp. pp. 142–3, 174–5, with the broader remarks cited at the opening of n. 81 above. As the example of William Warburton (p. 142) shows, not everyone who invokes the distinction itself applies it intensively to the 'deep structure' of human history, as does Vico, who further suggests its converse counterpart—the retrospective act of the intellectual who interpretively passes back in time through the 'modifications of our own human mind' to approach those primitive creatures whose 'minds were not in the least abstract,' because they were 'entirely immersed in the senses' and 'buried in the body.' On such 'modifications' (from which I have taken the subtitle of this section), see *New Science* 331, with 338, 349 and n. 96 below; on 'modifications' and time, see Pompa 1975, pp. 42–50. On the 'imaginative reconstruction' of the human past, 'self-analysing enquiry,' and the 'phenomenology' of the *New Science*, see Berlin 1976 (prior version 1960), esp. pp. 24–30, 35, 38, 48, 53, 57, 83, 98, 102–03, 107–08.

'Explanation of the Picture,' to the gradual exposition of chronology, principles, and corollaries in the new 'science' at large—is itself a kind of allegory of that history.⁹⁶ In any case, such a conceptual and historical progression does not entail for Vico as radical a 'translation' of the initial graphic image as it implies for more strictly 'rationalist' interpreters of ancient mythology—or for a range of interpreters from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries who regard the text of Christian Scripture as a form of 'mythological' expression to be assessed by 'historical-critical' investigation or to be 'demythologized' in contemporary terms.⁹⁷ Vico emphasizes rather the continuing power of 'poetic logic' to shape the deep structures of the mind and the constitutive features of civilization, an emphasis later diversely exhibited in a host of cognitive and social theo-

⁹⁶ For the frontispiece, its 'hieroglyphs,' and the 'Explanation,' see Vico 1999 (prior version 1990), p. 412 (Vico 1968 [prior version 1948], p. 2), and *New Science* 1–42. On the *New Science* itself as a kind of allegory, see Fletcher 1986; earlier discussions partly suggesting such an argument include Gombrich 1972 (not in prior version, 1948), pp. 184–6, and Frankel 1981. It should be stressed that Vico hopes the image of the frontispiece will help the reader not only to have a preliminary conception of the *New Science*, but also, with the aid of 'imagination,' to call the work 'back to mind' *after* it is read (*New Science* 1). Compare Rossi 1969, pp. 181–4; Verene 1981, pp. 96–126; Mazzotta 1999, pp. 229–31; and my discussion below. This two-way movement of the intellect away from and back toward the opening image has its 'internal' counterpart within the frontispiece itself, which evokes both the passage of civilization away from its earthly foundations toward 'metaphysic' and the converse passage of reflection back toward those foundations; see *New Science* 42 and 41. Such a two-way movement has its 'external' counterpart in the 'Course' ('il Corso') and 'Recourse' ('ricorrono') of nations themselves; see *New Science* 41, with 349. In effect, the two-way movement of 'explication' and 'complication' in earlier interpretive designs (on which see chapter 2 above, nn. 70–3) acquires in the *New Science* less a 'logical' or 'cosmological' orientation than a 'psychological' and 'socio-historical' one. Compare my discussion of 'textures' of interpretation in chapter 2 (v–viii).

⁹⁷ See, e.g., Frei 1974, pp. 233–44, arguing that members of the 'mythical school' of interpretation of Christian Scripture, with their 'rationalist' position, distanced themselves from the 'world of thought, sensibility, or discourse' of the writers they were examining (p. 243); Ricoeur 1980 (prior version 1968), writing in regard to Rudolf Bultmann's approach to the 'demythologization' of Christian Scripture that 'Bultmann holds that the "signification" of "mythological statements" is itself no longer mythological' (p. 64); Frei 1986, associating Paul Ricoeur with a form of hermeneutics in which 'the literal reading of the Gospel narratives vanishes' (p. 67). Such interpretive attitudes of course remain different from each other in important ways; see, e.g., Frei 1974, p. 337, n. 10, arguing for a sharp distinction between David Friedrich Strauss (of the 'mythical school') and Bultmann, although Frei's phrase about a 'wholly different' emphasis seems to me to need qualification. Compare Pépin 1976 (prior version 1958), pp. 53–6.

ries, from the philosophy of 'symbolic forms' of Cassirer to the social anthropology of Lévi-Strauss.⁹⁸ The old 'science' of interpretation had long sought to show that mythology has an underlying 'logic'; the new 'science' increasingly seeks to show that historically *logos* has a *mythos*—a story and a poetry—of its own.

*vi. Romantic approaches to 'allegory,' 'symbol,' and mythology:
the constructs of consciousness*

Might there be clear categories for 'poetic logic'? Approximately two centuries have passed since Romantic theorists first proposed a sharp distinction between 'allegory' and 'symbol.' According to that distinction, variously conceived and elaborated by critics such as Goethe, Schelling, and Coleridge, in allegorical writing the image is separable from the idea; in symbolic writing, the one inherently participates in the other.⁹⁹ After decades of criticism calling that distinction deeply into question,¹⁰⁰ many now seem to regard the coherently

⁹⁸ On the continuing importance of 'poetic logic' (*New Science* 400), see, e.g., Cantelli 1976, pp. 51, 62; Verene 1981, esp. pp. 193–221; Mali 1992, esp. pp. 181–9, 225–8, 259–72; Danesi 1993, esp. pp. 121–42; Mazzotta 1999, esp. pp. 8–11, 56–7, 119–20, 135–9, 159–60, 203, 225–33. On overlapping approaches in Cassirer and Lévi-Strauss, see, e.g., Paci 1969; Verene 1976; Leach 1969; Hughes 1969, pp. 324–6; compare Dorfler 1969 on Vico and views of metaphorical language in twentieth-century aesthetics.

⁹⁹ For overviews, see, e.g., Wellek 1955, I, pp. 208–12, 230, and II, pp. 17–18, 23–4, 40–4, 72–80; Dieckmann 1959; Gadamer 1975 (prior version 1960), pp. 64–73; Todorov 1982 (prior version 1977), pp. 147–221. It should be stressed that particular theorists develop the general argument in diverse directions; see, e.g., Todorov, esp. pp. 206–07, 221, on 'allegory'/'symbol' as arbitrary/motivated, pointing/participating, transitive/intransitive, previously made/productive, conceptualized/evocative, etc. On ambivalent turns toward 'allegory' in Romantic theory and practice despite such attitudes, see, e.g., Kelley 1997, esp. pp. 93–175.

¹⁰⁰ Aside from the belatedly influential work of Benjamin 1977 (prior version 1928), an important precedent for such criticism is Honig 1959. It should be noted, however, that in the two decades between Honig 1959 and de Man 1979 much of this kind of criticism tended broadly to shift in emphasis from the argument that in effect 'allegorical' writing itself repeatedly blends—philosophically, psychologically, imaginatively, or linguistically—image and idea, to the converse argument that 'symbolic' writing regularly entails the kinds of internal disparities that allegory exposes. De Man 1969 is central to this shift. For some of the critical discussions of this period, see Honig 1959 (with the comment of Dawson 1992, p. 252, n. 44); Jauss 1960, esp. pp. 179–91, Jauss 1964, esp. pp. 108–18, and Jauss 1968, esp. pp. 146–51; Bloomfield 1963; Fletcher 1964, esp. pp. 13–23; Tuve 1966; Nuttall 1967, esp. pp. 15–48; de Man 1969 and 1979; Crossan 1976; Culler 1976; Christensen 1978. For discussions from 1959 to 1979 arguing to different degrees that early

self-transcending 'symbol' as considerably more alien than 'allegory' itself. In retrospect, the 'symbol' is neither wholly Romantic nor entirely strange; it overlaps partially with a host of earlier figures in the development of allegory at large:¹⁰¹ the 'non-discursive' and 'organically' ordered *symbolon* of late antique interpretation;¹⁰² the natural yet sacramental figure of medieval theology;¹⁰³ the concept-embodying hieroglyph of Renaissance critical theory;¹⁰⁴ the sensuous primal image of eighteenth-century mythography.¹⁰⁵ Yet the 'symbol' of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries remains a distinctive expression of its own era. Its attempt to fuse image and idea reflects historic pressures that have long been subjects of critical investigation: the post-Enlightenment problem of instilling 'organic' life into a world analyzed according to 'abstract' and 'mechanical' principles; the post-Kantian difficulty of engaging the phenomenal realm with the noumenal one; the post-Revolutionary dilemma of organizing fluctuating events into a purposeful design.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps nothing more strikingly displays its ambivalent relation to earlier allegory than its treatment of the passage of time itself—including 'sacred history.' The typo-

Romantic theory itself includes a conscious recognition of certain tensions in the 'symbol,' see, e.g., Dieckmann 1959; de Man 1969; Todorov 1982 (prior version 1977), pp. 147–221; Mellor 1979.

¹⁰¹ It should be stressed that differences of orientation remain regarding each of these figures; see the notes and remarks below.

¹⁰² See J.A. Coulter 1976 and Trimpf 1983, pp. 164–240, with my discussion above in chapter 2 (i). The terms *symbolon* and *allegoria* or their derivatives repeatedly intermingle in antiquity; see, e.g., Coulter 1976, pp. 63–8, and Pépin 1987, pp. 253–5 (prior version of chapter 1970).

¹⁰³ See Chenu 1968 (prior version 1957), esp. pp. 119–41, and Wetherbee 1972, esp. pp. 49–66, with the remarks on Goethe in Gadamer 1975 (prior version 1960), p. 507, n. 142.

¹⁰⁴ See my discussion and annotation above in chapter 12 (iii), including the quotations from Webster and Coleridge cited in n. 55, and the essay below by Charles Dempsey in chapter 15. The recurrent Romantic adaptation of the term 'hieroglyph' is at least at times more than a verbal gesture; see, e.g., Novalis on the language of fable and 'hieroglyphics'; Friedrich Schlegel on mythology as a 'hieroglyphic expression of surrounding nature' (both cited by Seyhan 1992, pp. 41, 141); and Coleridge (in Coleridge 1972) on the 'vegetable' creation 'symbolizing' the 'unity of nature' and adorning or engraving ('inchases') the 'unfolded volume' of the earth 'with the hieroglyphics of her history.' Compare Ranke (cited by Gossman 1990, pp. 395–6, n. 64 [prior version of essay 1989]) on the divinely ordered 'connectedness of all history' that 'stands before us like a holy hieroglyph.'

¹⁰⁵ See my discussion and annotation above in chapter 12 (v), including the quotations from Vico, Schelling, and Coleridge cited in nn. 87 and 90.

¹⁰⁶ For overviews of such problems, see, e.g., Abrams 1953, esp. pp. 64–9, 159–225, 303–12; Mellor 1979; Kosselleck 1985, pp. 21–38 (prior version of essay 1967) and 130–55 (prior version of essay 1977).

logical interpretation of Christian Scripture, for example, undergoes telling changes in Coleridge's *Statesman's Manual* (1816), a 'lay sermon' in which he treats the Christian Bible as a guide to 'the science of the future in its perpetual elements' and formulates in this regard a particularly influential definition of the 'symbol.'¹⁰⁷ Attributing to 'Facts and Persons' in 'Scriptural history' a 'two-fold significance, a past and a future' application, Coleridge extends that application far beyond the correlation of an 'Old' Testament with a 'New' one; he pointedly considers a passage in the book of Isaiah to be a 'remembrancer' of the harsh conditions in which Napoleonic forces retreated from Moscow.¹⁰⁸ Yet in defining the 'symbol' of Christian Scripture as *aei tautēgorikon*—always tautegorical, saying something that is identical to itself—Coleridge repeatedly appeals less to chronological change than to a logical and theological order organized by 'Reason' itself.¹⁰⁹ This theo/logical sense of the 'symbol' tends in turn to pass more broadly toward a biological sense of aligning every agent in

¹⁰⁷ Quotations and page numbers refer to the edition in Coleridge 1972; see pp. 3, 8, 28–31. On the broad question of similarities and differences between Christian 'type' and Romantic 'symbol,' see Talmadge 1986, pp. 341–2, and Whitman 1991; compare Prickett 1991. Changes in terminology complicate the question; see, e.g., Levere 1981, pp. 214–15, on the nineteenth-century use of the word 'type' to refer not only to prophetic designs but also to natural structures. Whatever the degree of influence of 'type' upon 'symbol,' the 'symbol,' for its part, seems to play a role in the retrospective conception of the 'type.' See the important passage in Schelling's *Ueber Dante in philosophischer Beziehung* (1856–61 ed., V, pp. 155–6), situating figures from Dante's *Comedy* in an intermediate form between 'symbolic mythology' ('symbolische Mythologie') and 'wholly allegorical' poetry ('ganz allegorisch')—an intermediate form that binds 'allegory and history' ('Allegorisches und Historisches verknüpfen'). The passage has extremely close parallels in Auerbach's influential essay on "'Figura'" (1959, pp. 58 and 73 [prior version 1938, pp. 472 and 486]): 'These two comparisons, with allegory ('die Allegorie') on the one hand and with the symbolical, mythical forms ('die symbolisch-mythischen Formen') on the other, disclose figural prophecy in a twofold light . . . For Dante . . . the historical ('historische') reality is not annulled, but confirmed and fulfilled by the deeper meaning ('die tiefere Bedeutung').' Pépin 1987, pp. 260–5 (prior version of chapter 1970), cites the passage from Schelling in a French translation on which I have drawn and observes (more generally) the relation to Auerbach, Dante, and theories of typology, though he does not fully raise the question of whether the very notion of 'typology' in an Auerbachian sense is partly a projection backward from such Romantic distinctions.

¹⁰⁸ See *Statesman's Manual*, pp. 28–30, 34–5. Compare Frei 1974, pp. 46–50, discussing the inclination already in the seventeenth century to expand typological interpretation into a 'constant positioning' between the figures of Christian Scripture and the frame of history at large, and citing the 'baroque proliferation of figural reading' in Johannes Cocceius, for whom the fulfillments of 'Old Testament' figures include the death of Sweden's Protestant king Gustavus Adolphus.

¹⁰⁹ See *Statesman's Manual*, pp. 29–30, with Hodgson 1981, esp. pp. 279–80, Whitman 1991, esp. pp. 168–9, and my discussion below.

Christian Scripture with one comprehensive 'life,' and finally toward a psychological sense of developing a consciousness which participates in that cosmic whole.¹¹⁰ For a mind perpetually seeking to recover its own formative principles, the process of history is a deeply ambivalent phenomenon; while time conveys the divine 'mystery,' it also complicates it.¹¹¹ It is revealing that when writers of the Romantic period regard historical change from a less explicitly sacral perspective, they frequently stress its fluctuating contingencies. Even when Romantics such as Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis seek in more general terms to turn toward a transcendent realm, they repeatedly invoke expressions like 'allegory' or forms like the fragment to register the disparities and drives of human experience, as Azade Seyhan observes in chapter 18 of this volume.¹¹² The exploration of such strains eventually unsettles the 'symbol' of the early Romantic movement itself.¹¹³

The Romantic 'symbol' has nonetheless a far-reaching 'future' application, not least for the theory and practice of ways of writing diversely regarded as 'allegorical.'¹¹⁴ And the language of the past which informs that future is not only Christian Scripture, but also pagan mythology, one of the sources for the Romantic project of a 'new mythology.'¹¹⁵ Between the late eighteenth and the mid-nine-

¹¹⁰ See the detailed discussion and notes in Whitman 1991, pp. 168–72, with the extensive analyses of the organic and psychic aspects of 'the one Life within us and abroad' (as Coleridge elsewhere puts it) by Barfield 1971, pp. 44–5, 55–7, 60–1, 68, 98–9, 113–14, 132–3, 154, 158–63, 177–8, 230, n. 45, 257, n. 21, 258, n. 25; Barth 1972; Wilson 1972; and Abrams 1974.

¹¹¹ Regarding this ambivalence, compare, e.g., *Statesman's Manual*, pp. 29–30 on 'the stream of time continuous as Life and a symbol of Eternity,' with pp. 49–50, on the 'hidden mystery' that 'freed from the phenomena of Time and Space . . . reveals itself to the pure Reason as the actual immanence of ALL in EACH'—a disclosure finally requiring an escape from temporal and spatial relations. See also Whitman 1991, pp. 171–2 and notes, including the reference to Coleridge's later *Aids to Reflection* (cited by Hodgson 1981, pp. 284–5), on 'Before and after' as 'but allegories' when applied to transcendent subjects. There is nonetheless a sense of historical engagement in both the theological and practical orientation of Coleridge; see Dawson 1990, esp. pp. 298, 301, 305–06.

¹¹² See also Mellor 1979 and Seyhan 1992 on the dialectic between limitation and progression in Schlegel and Novalis.

¹¹³ See my discussion below in this chapter and the essays of Rainer Nägele and Tobin Siebers in chapters 19 and 20.

¹¹⁴ For various arguments suggesting passages between 'symbol' and 'allegory'—diversely defined—in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see, e.g., Culler 1976; de Man 1979; Jauss 1979; Miller 1981; Whitman 1993, pp. 34–5; and the essay below of Rainer Nägele in chapter 19.

¹¹⁵ On the early Romantic project of a 'new mythology,' see Seyhan 1992, pp. 6, 73–4, 81, 112–16.

teenth centuries, theorists such as Moritz, August Wilhelm Schlegel, and Schelling ascribe to ancient mythological figures the kind of primal integrity often attributed in this period to the 'symbol.'¹¹⁶ 'Mythology,' argues Schelling, 'is not allegorical; it is tautegorical. For mythology, the gods are beings that really exist; . . . they signify only what they are.'¹¹⁷ Such singular, self-contained figures seem to be even more resistant to interpretive transfer than Vico's *diversiloquium*, to say nothing of the medieval *alieniloquium*.¹¹⁸ Yet by the time he writes this, Schelling has constructed an expansive interpretive system to explain the historical development of all mythologies as the gradual unfolding of a trinitarian God in the collective consciousness of the human race.¹¹⁹ It should be stressed that for Schelling the three interacting 'Potencies' ('Potenzen') which inform the plots of different theogonies are not mere fables, but actual, powerful modulations of the Christian God in the historical progression of the human mind.¹²⁰ Still, Schelling's sense that the figures of such mythological dramas can be revealed in retrospect as successive 'personalities' ('Persönlichkeiten') of a single divine principle suggests that even on the cosmic level, 'personification'—the dramatic composition of 'persons'—is hardly passé; rather, the dramatic medium is extending beyond texts into time.¹²¹ No less important for the 'future' of figurative

¹¹⁶ See Wellek 1955, II, pp. 43–4, 76; Pépin 1976 (prior version 1958), pp. 56–61; Todorov 1982 (prior version 1977), pp. 149, 162–4, 209–11, 214, 216–18.

¹¹⁷ See the *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* in Schelling (1856–61 edition), XI [vol. 1 of 2nd division], pp. 195–6; the translation is from Todorov 1982 (prior version 1977), pp. 163–4. Though Schelling adapts the term 'tautegorical' from Coleridge (cited in my discussion above), in large measure the notion (which overlaps with the early Romantic notion of the 'symbol') appears already in Schelling's work in the opening years of the nineteenth century, and the application of the general notion to ancient mythology goes back at least to Moritz. See Pépin 1976 (prior version 1958), pp. 58–9; Todorov 1982 (prior version 1977), pp. 149, 162–3; Beach 1994, p. 261, n. 38.

¹¹⁸ On *diversiloquium* and *alieniloquium*, see my discussion above in n. 86.

¹¹⁹ See the detailed analysis of Beach 1994.

¹²⁰ On mythological theogonies as authentic expressions of the developing human mind, compare my discussion of Vico in section v above, esp. n. 88; Schelling's orientation, of course, displays a more idealist strain. On Schelling's 'Potencies' as actual powers, see Beach 1994, pp. 43–4, 95, 116, 127, 139, 167, 181–2, 187, 231, 235, 242. It has been argued that far more than Hegel's approach, Schelling's notion of eternity historically entering into the developmental process partially anticipates the 'materialist' and 'existentialist' philosophies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; see Beach, pp. 64–5, 83–91, 111–13, 127–9, 164–76, 239–40, who cites Hegel's telling statement that 'temporal difference has no interest at all for thought' (p. 90).

¹²¹ See *Philosophy of Revelation* in Schelling (1856–61 edition), XIII [vol. 3 of 2nd

interpretation is the psychic aspect of such cosmic unfolding/infolding.¹²² Long after Schelling argues that the forces which underlie mythological stories are fundamental drives emerging primordially in the collective consciousness of the race, twentieth-century movements ranging from Jungian psychology to literary 'myth criticism' will turn mythological 'archetypes' into formative structures for various scripts in human life—including scripts regarded as sacred.¹²³ In any case,

division], p. 463, on the recognition of the three chief gods of the Eleusinian Mysteries as 'successive personalities of one and the same God . . . going out of himself, through himself, into himself—just different forms or rather, moments, of this One'; for the translation, see Beach 1994, p. 240, with his comments on 'masks or personae' and 'figurative images' (p. 243). On 'persons' (*prosōpa*) and 'personification' (*prosopopoeia*) in literary and religious terms, see Whitman 1987a, esp. pp. 269–72, with the detailed discussions specified in the index of that work s.v. 'personification'; on the personification of divine powers and their relation to temporal progression in the twelfth-century *Cosmographia*, see Whitman 1987a, pp. 218–60, esp. pp. 222–3, 226–32, 237–43, 248–55. The nineteenth-century mythographer, more 'historicist' in orientation than the twelfth-century cosmographer, seeks elaborately to correlate the figures of his divine drama with stages of human consciousness. Despite these and other differences, the overlap between Schelling's approach and earlier allegorical strategies is suggested not only by his general argument for a Christian deep structure to pagan mythology—one of the most persistent features of Christian mythography—but also by his particular images of disguise or clothing for forms of divine figuration. Beach 1994 notes such imagery (pp. 140, 234–7), but this dimension of it needs to be clarified. On different notions of covering and clothing in early theology, mythography, and allegory, see Pépin 1987, pp. 98–101, 117–23, 128–31 (prior version of essay 1958), and 137–65 (prior version of essay 1954). Carlyle might have been partly sympathetic to Schelling's divine *Sartor*, but Mr. Casaubon of *Middlemarch* would perhaps have been less pleased with this aspect of a 'Key to all Mythologies.'

¹²² On cosmic unfolding/infolding, see, among many passages, the one quoted in the previous note about 'one and the same God . . . going out of himself, through himself, into himself.' The background for such a notion of cosmic unfolding/infolding is not only specifically Christian, but also broadly Neoplatonic; on the implications of the Neoplatonic argument for early allegory, see Whitman 1987a, pp. 63–6, 91–8, 144–60, 168–9, 192–5, 218–62. On 'explication'/'complication' in the 'textures' of interpretive designs themselves, see my remarks above in chapter 2, nn. 70–3, and chapter 12, nn. 22 and 96. Whereas Schelling attributes to the Eleusinian Mysteries a 'schematized recapitulation of the chief episodes in the history of the mythological consciousness' (Beach 1994, p. 239), it can be argued that he presents his own mythographic investigation as a systematic way of exposing and recomposing that history in comparative and historicist form.

¹²³ On Schelling's notion of 'dialectically generated archetypes springing from the deep structure of the psyche, constituting "one aspect" of God,' see Beach 1994, p. 235, with pp. 133, 182, 184–5, 196, 228–9, 239–40, 244–6, including references to Jung and Freud. On Jungian psychology in the context of Schelling's orientation, see Pépin 1976 (prior version 1958), pp. 52–3, 67–73. With regard to Jung's differentiation (related to Schelling's distinction) between 'allegory' and 'symbol,' there are not only theoretical but also practical complications; see, e.g., Jung on the 'most effective ideals' as 'fairly obvious variants of an archetype' that 'lend themselves to allegory' (trans. Hull 1966 [prior version 1922], rpt. Adams 1971, p. 818),

the critical effort to implicate mythology with the process of history has more than one dimension. Already in the early nineteenth century, Creuzer is suggesting a different sense in which mythology discloses historical development—the progression of a ‘series of moments’ in the very movement of mythological narrative. For Creuzer that extension transforms the ‘instantaneous totality’ of the ‘symbol’ into ‘allegory.’ Creuzer and his contemporaries could hardly imagine how later theories about successive ‘moments’ in art and experience would eventually treat ‘symbol’ theory itself as an ideological ‘totality’ to be shattered by—‘allegory.’¹²⁴

vii. Early twentieth-century reassessments of ‘allegory’: the strains of history

The critical history of ‘allegory’ in the modern period is not the story of a smooth progression or a continuous revival. For most theorists from the last years of the nineteenth century to the middle years of the twentieth century, ‘allegory’ remains in the shadow of the primal Romantic ‘symbol’—a schematic, largely insubstantial projection of the analytic mind.¹²⁵ There are exceptions. At times during this period, ‘allegory’ (diversely conceived) is aligned at least intermittently with deep changes in the configuration of human experience. Evoking the fluid transformations of identity explored in the

and Jung on the archetypal figure of the ‘old man’ as ‘a personified thought’ (cited in Piehler 1971, p. 38); compare Piehler’s own argument with references to Jung on pp. 1–20 and 157–62. On the vast subject of ‘myth criticism,’ see the overview with bibliography of Vickery 1993. On the treatment of Christian Scripture in terms of underlying mythological structures, see, e.g., the references above in n. 97.

¹²⁴ On Creuzer, see the translation and discussion in Todorov 1982 (prior version 1977), pp. 216–21, including Todorov’s citation of Solger regarding ‘action’ and ‘allegory.’ On later theory, see Benjamin 1977 (prior version 1928), esp. pp. 163–7, including his references to Creuzer, Görres, and Schelling; de Man 1969, esp. pp. 222–8; my discussion below in this chapter; and the essays of Azade Seyhan, Rainer Nägele, and Tobin Siebers in chapters 18–20. On late antique Neoplatonic arguments regarding the discursive temporal format of mythology and its reference to the divine condition of simultaneity, see Pépin 1976 (prior version 1958), pp. 190–2, with pp. 503–16 (prior version of essay 1962).

¹²⁵ Such an attitude, sometimes accompanied by certain qualifications, underlies the early twentieth-century comments of critics as diverse as Johan Huizinga, Emil Winkler, Helen F. Dunbar, Erich Auerbach (contrasting ‘allegory’ with both ‘*figura*’ and ‘symbol,’ on which see my note 107 above), and Roger Hinks, cited by Jaus 1960, pp. 181–3, and Fletcher 1964, p. 5, n. 9, and p. 17, n. 31. Even at mid-century, a critic valuing certain forms of allegory but considering it primarily ‘didactic’ and ‘subjective’ in orientation (Bloom 1951) can write: ‘If allegory no longer receives any serious acceptance, it is because there is no longer any real need for it’ (p. 189).

'symbolist' movement, Proust can write of art in which 'l'allégorie' is 'la loi des existences.'¹²⁶ Expressing a conspicuously different approach to human existence and art, Heidegger yet invokes 'allegory' in developing his argument that conditions of historical being are both concealed and revealed in the 'rift' of a work's design.¹²⁷ Even a critic as deeply influenced by Coleridgean categories as C.S. Lewis tends to oscillate between the view that allegorical expression is a 'fiction' and the view that it presents 'contending forces which cannot be described at all except by allegory.'¹²⁸ But in many respects the most sustained effort in the early twentieth century to implicate the tensions of allegory with the flux of human events is the work of Walter Benjamin. Critical to that work is his study of the baroque German 'mourning play.'¹²⁹ In part *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* reflects a general tendency early in the twentieth century to controvert notions of human history as an organic development or a steady evolutionary movement. From Benjamin's perspective, temporal change is a volatile process marked by discontinuous, fragmentary moments.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ See Hassine 1995, p. 26, with pp. 29–31, 38–9; compare the precedent of Baudelaire, discussed by Jauss 1979. On the different notion of an 'allegory of reading' in the work of Proust himself, see de Man 1979, pp. 57–78 (prior version of essay 1972).

¹²⁷ See 'The Origin of the Work of Art,' in Heidegger 1971, pp. 19–20 (prior version of essay delivered as lecture, 1935): 'The art work . . . manifests something other; it is an allegory.' Heidegger's terminology is not strict—'The work is a symbol,' he writes shortly afterward—and his approach has extensive Romantic tendencies; but his notion of the 'rift' (*Riss*) suggests more than a verbal adaptation of 'allegory'; compare Bruns 1992, pp. 206–08 (prior version of essay 1991). On Benjamin's different notion of an 'origin' that 'tears (*reißt*) the stuff of emergence into its rhythm,' see the translation and discussion of Weber 1991, pp. 468–71, with the discussion of Heidegger in Steinberg 1996c, pp. 96–106.

¹²⁸ See Lewis 1936, pp. 45 and 113, cited and discussed by Nuttall 1966, pp. 15–48, with the discussion of Piehler 1988.

¹²⁹ Citations refer to the edition of *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928) in Benjamin 1978 (prior version 1974), hereafter *Ursprung*, and—unless otherwise indicated—to the translation in Benjamin 1977, hereafter *Origin*.

¹³⁰ On diverse forms of the early twentieth-century critique and Benjamin's own views in different periods, see Kittsteiner 1986; Weber 1991, esp. pp. 465–76; Mosès 1992, esp. pp. 98–100, 122–7, 136–81; Bambach 1995, esp. pp. 1–19, 160–76, 232–73; Steinberg 1996b, esp. pp. 14–15, 18–20, and 1996c, esp. pp. 91–3. Instead of a 'historical continuum with equally measured intervals' and 'a kind of secularized theology of cause and effect which presumed the coherence of all events' (Bambach, pp. 9, 6), Benjamin writes already in the *Origin* of historical 'origin' as a powerful 'eddy' ('Strudel,' *Ursprung*, p. 226; *Origin*, p. 45; 'maelstrom' in the translation of Weber, p. 468) and argues later for the need to incline toward 'a consciousness of the present which explodes the continuum of history' (cited by Steinberg 1996c, p. 93).

In chapter 19 of this volume, Rainer Nägele discusses some of the intellectual and imaginative expressions of such fragmentation both before and during Benjamin's own time.¹³¹ For Benjamin, in fact, the very 'origin' of any event is already split between a 'pre-' and a 'post-history'—a still undetermined future subject to the conflicting strains of their later configurations.¹³² Allegory, he argues, radically exposes such historical strains. The tension not only marks the Christian effort to rescue 'for eternity' the transient world of the gods in the 'guilt-laden' pagan past.¹³³ It also promotes the urgently driven, flamboyantly allegorical exercises of seventeenth-century drama, which for Benjamin expose such temporal and spiritual conflicts at their critical breaking point. In his view of the 'drama' of the seventeenth century at large, a deep, post-Reformation anxiety regarding the deprivation of divine grace leaves a redemptive personal future remote; devalued earthly creatures in bodies about to become corpses are increasingly polarized from their spiritual reference points; the transitory world mourns amid its ponderous ruins the loss of a transcendence to which it desperately, theatrically points.¹³⁴ The Romantic 'symbol,' belatedly aiming to integrate image and idea, has long been overtaken by events; already in the baroque, 'ideas evaporate in images.' Allegory turns into the melancholy figure of the movement of history into 'modernity' itself.¹³⁵

In recent decades, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*—long after its original publication (1928)—has come to exercise a wide-ranging influence upon theories of allegory in general.¹³⁶ The work remains penetrating in its power. Yet in retrospect the study seems at times to be in considerable tension with the allegorical writing that it explores. Questions can be raised, for example, about the extent to which Benjamin's approach is congruent with the treatment of human

¹³¹ For a more detailed discussion, see Nägele 1992.

¹³² On 'Vor- und Nachgeschichte,' see *Ursprung*, p. 226 (*Origin*, p. 46), with the translation and discussion of Weber 1991, pp. 466–74.

¹³³ See *Ursprung*, pp. 393–400; *Origin*, pp. 220–6.

¹³⁴ See, e.g., *Ursprung*, pp. 259–60, 317–20, 353–8, 390–3, 398, 405–09; *Origin*, pp. 80–1, 138–42, 177–82, 215–20, 224–5, 232–5.

¹³⁵ For the phrase 'So verdunsten vielfach die Gedanken in Bildern,' see *Ursprung*, p. 375 (*Origin*, p. 199), with Benjamin's reference to Johann Christian Hallmann. On the movement to 'modernity,' see Mosès 1992, pp. 140–1; Nägele 1992; Kelley 1997, pp. 251–64; and the essay of Rainer Nägele in chapter 19 of this volume.

¹³⁶ One important factor in this influence is its role in de Man 1969; on de Man's approach, see my discussion below in section viii and the essay of Tobin Siebers in chapter 20 of this volume.

designs in German baroque drama, the evaluation of worldly phenomena in the seventeenth century, or the orientation toward the pagan gods in Christianity at large.¹³⁷ More pointedly, some of the shifts by which Benjamin seeks to reveal the movement of allegory as a whole seem to require more careful distinctions than they receive in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. The celebrated inversion depicted at the end of the work, for example—the ‘about-turn’ (‘Umschwung’) by which ruins point problematically to redemption¹³⁸—needs to be more clearly set against the background of complex allegorical inversions in earlier periods—from the vertiginous cosmic allegory in which a ‘waste and void’ earth (Gen. 1) figuratively refers to a transcendent realm, to the slyly roguish argument according to which an individual should experience evil in order to know good.¹³⁹ Such contexts would help to clarify the dimensions—metaphysical, perceptual, psychological—in which allegorical ‘about-turns’ do or do not take place. Still more broadly, the question raised by Benjamin’s study, and by the figure of complaining or lamenting nature that seems to haunt his work at large,¹⁴⁰ concerns not only the modes, but also the moods, of allegorical writing. It would be hard to find a more self-conflicted, ingeniously entangled, verbally involuted allegory than the twelfth-century *Complaint of Nature*, in which the figure of Nature repeatedly and circuitously laments how the nature of nat-

¹³⁷ On the first two issues, see Kiesel 1979, pp. 728–31. For comments on the second issue, see Kittsteiner 1996, p. 56, n. 32, with my discussion and notes above (section iv) on the practice of emblematics; from the perspective of recent research, that practice often appears less disjunctive than it does in Benjamin’s early twentieth-century presentation. On the last issue, see my discussion and notes above in section ii; Benjamin’s stress on efforts to demonize the gods gives inadequate attention, for example, to efforts to moralize and even ‘spiritualize’ them. Even if it were argued that Benjamin construes these subjects from the perspective of his present attitudes, his own theory of ‘origin’ requires a closer analysis of the diverse conditions under which such subjects acquire form.

¹³⁸ See *Ursprung*, pp. 405–09; *Origin*, pp. 232–5. On the problem of evaluating Benjamin’s attitude toward such an ‘about-turn,’ compare Weber 1991, pp. 496–500; Mosès 1992, pp. 95–181; Nägele 1992, pp. 200–06; Kittsteiner 1996, pp. 55–6; Rancière 1996, pp. 37–8; and Kelley 1997, pp. 257–9.

¹³⁹ On the interpretation of ‘waste and void’ in the version of Genesis 1:2 in John the Scot Eriugena’s ninth-century *Periphyseon*, the argument about evil and good in Jean de Meun’s part of the thirteenth-century *Romance of the Rose*, and the more general issue of different dimensions of inversion in philosophic and imaginative writing, see, respectively, Whitman 1987a, pp. 144–60, esp. pp. 154–6; Whitman 1981, pp. 79–84, with Whitman 1991; and the overview in Whitman 1981.

¹⁴⁰ On this figure in *Ursprung*, see p. 398; *Origin*, pp. 224–5. On versions of the figure elsewhere in Benjamin’s work, see the references and discussion in Wohlfarth 1989.

ural things is denatured; yet at least on one level, the sense of play in that allegory is frequently more comic or satiric than melancholic.¹⁴¹ The brooding melancholy implicitly attributed in some recent criticism to allegory as a whole is part of the melodrama of contemporary theory. It remains the case, as displayed beyond words in Benjamin's own time, that there is a strain in human history far darker than melancholy, and that forms of allegory historically contribute to it. But Benjamin himself, in his own engaged and anguished writing, insisted nonetheless on the critical need to confront as acutely as possible the 'post-history' of what is past and present.

viii. Poststructuralist critiques of figuration: the signs of the times

The 'return' of 'allegory' from the 'remote' concerns of the past to the critical center of the present predates poststructuralism. Already in the 1950s, the term is given a universal sense in relation to acts of commentary at large, with Northrop Frye's influential argument that 'all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of poetic imagery.' As I have suggested in chapter 1, not the least irony in the history of allegory is that this critical valorization of the 'attaching of ideas' to 'imagery' is deeply implicated with Romantic notions of the self-contained symbol— notions that Frye's argument about interpretation eventually helps to displace.¹⁴² But later in the twentieth century, especially with the diffusion of structuralist and poststructuralist approaches to texts, a range of theorists also give the term 'allegory' a universal sense in relation to acts of composition itself.¹⁴³ 'All representational poetry,'

¹⁴¹ On the treatment in Alan of Lille's *Complaint of Nature* of recurrent verbal, ethical, and spiritual entanglements such as 'nature naturalia denaturare' and 'deform the formliness of formly Venus by deformation' ('forme formositatem Veneris informatione deformant'), see Whitman 1987b (with the citations on pp. 22 and 15 of the article). It would of course be possible to 'explain'—contextually, formally, philosophically, historically—differences between such diverse figures of complaining or lamenting nature; the point is that Benjamin's approach frequently tends to blur differences in allegory by repeated references to a single mood.

¹⁴² For Frye's argument in this context, see chapter 1 (iii), including references to later, diversely oriented critical discussions that tend to universalize the association between 'allegory' and interpretation. The use of the term 'allegory' to describe acts of commentary at large originates, of course, in antiquity and the Middle Ages; the point in this case is Frye's conspicuous turn of the term in the context of the modern period.

¹⁴³ See, e.g., Owens 1980, p. 64, arguing that allegory is not 'merely appended

it is argued by the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, 'is always also allegorical . . . and the allegorical power of the language undermines and obscures the specific literal meaning . . .'.¹⁴⁴ Some ten years afterward, it is possible to regard allegory retrospectively as 'the trope of tropes, representative of the figurality of all language, of the distance between signifier and signified.'¹⁴⁵ Among many differences from medieval and Renaissance associations between allegory and composition at large, late twentieth-century arguments frequently tend to depict the 'allegorical' aspect of composition as primarily subversive or disjunctive in its operation. It would be possible to exemplify this change in many ways. But in the context of a discussion like this one, concentrating on the relation between allegory and history, one fundamental turning point is 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' (1969) by Paul de Man. It is revealing that the notion of 'temporality,' which de Man associates with his concept of 'allegory,' noticeably oscillates over the course of his essay. At one point 'temporality' refers to an ontological condition, the human 'mutability' that betrays the aim of the Romantic 'symbol' to fuse the constructs of the human imagination with the conditions of an enduring world. At another point it refers to a semiological condition, a 'relationship between signs,' in which one sign repeats a 'previous sign' with which 'it can never coincide,' since the previous sign involves 'pure anteriority.'

to the work of art,' but is 'a structural possibility inherent in every work.' On theoretical and practical distinctions between allegorical 'interpretation' and allegorical 'composition' in different periods and the interaction between them, see Whitman 1987a and 1993. I have suggested some of the conceptual and historical problems of universalizing the term 'allegory' in Whitman 1987a, p. 7, n. 4, and 1993, pp. 31–2; see also my discussion below.

¹⁴⁴ See de Man 1983 (prior [published] version 1970; lecture version 1969), p. 185.

¹⁴⁵ See Fineman 1981 (prior [published] version 1980; lecture version 1979), p. 27. General associations between 'allegory' and broad forms of composition or the act of composition at large develop particularly in 'deconstructionist' critiques, but it should be noted that such associations—diversely evaluated—appear in a host of late twentieth-century discussions with varying critical orientations. In little over a decade, from the early 1970s to the early 1980s, see, e.g., Gayatri Spivak (1971), cited by Fineman, p. 58, n. 54; De Man 1979, p. 76 (prior version of essay 1972), with the 1979 volume as a whole; Hayden White (1976), cited by Fletcher 1986, p. 42, n. 3; Quilligan 1979, p. 15; Owens 1980, p. 64; Jameson 1981, p. 34. Precedents in the mid-1960s include Fletcher 1964, p. 8, and Frye 1974 (prior version 1965), p. 12, which to a large extent repeats his earlier formulation in the 1950s about commentary but includes the revealing remark: allegory 'is a structural element in narrative; it has to be there, and is not added by critical interpretation alone.' See, however, his qualification (p. 13): though commentary may 'allegorize' plays, for example, 'this does not, as is sometimes said, turn the plays into allegories.' Compare my discussion in this section on the shifting critical association later in the twentieth century between 'allegory' and composition in general.

At still another point it refers to a narratological condition, the 'temporal structure' of a text with its 'successive description' of 'stages' of consciousness.¹⁴⁶ The shifts are not clearly specified and methodically assessed by de Man himself, and to argue that one condition is a 'figure' for another would be to beg the very question about what 'figuration' entails that the essay aims to clarify.¹⁴⁷ With de Man's later collection of essays in his influential *Allegories of Reading* (1979), temporal problems repeatedly turn into textual ones, and 'allegory' marks the general condition of conflicting rhetorical demands that leave the reading of texts at an impasse.¹⁴⁸ The issues raised by such a theory have included particularly pointed questions in the case of Paul de Man himself. After his death in the 1980s, it was discovered that his own past included his public expression of anti-semitic and collaborationist views during the early 1940s in newspapers starkly cooperating with the Nazis.¹⁴⁹ The question of how his

¹⁴⁶ For these quotations, see de Man 1969, pp. 196–7, 207–08, 224–5. On the tension between the second and first arguments in de Man's early work, see Lentricchia 1980, pp. 282–317, including p. 287, distinguishing between 'the post-structuralist belief that all talk of origin is deluded' and the notion that 'origins are acceptable . . . as long as we have the proper (existentialist, secular, dualistic, tragic, fearful, and agonized) view of them.' For approaches more sympathetic to de Man's work, see, e.g., the references in the following note.

¹⁴⁷ See the opening paragraph of the essay on 'the question of the intentionality of rhetorical figures' and 'the need for historical clarification' (pp. 187–8). Compare the reservations expressed by de Man in the 1983 collection in which the essay is reprinted (p. xii): its 'rhetorical terminology' is 'still uncomfortably intertwined with the thematic vocabulary of consciousness and of temporality that was current at the time.' For efforts to situate the problems of the essay in terms of the sense of entanglement stressed by de Man himself, see Jacobs 1989 and Bahti 1989; compare Newmark 1989. While such efforts offer useful perspectives, the appeal to de Man's own problematic categories and his thoughts about inescapable perplexity seem to me persuasive largely for those who have already accepted these or related notions. At times there are further complications. A discussion claiming the need for radical 'irony' tends (whether or not 'ironically') to call into question the status of its own claims—including the claim about the need for radical 'irony'; compare Jacobs 1989, with the remark on 'darkness' in the final paragraph (pp. 118–19).

¹⁴⁸ See, e.g., de Man 1979, p. 78 (partly added to prior version of essay, de Man 1972), arguing that 'what we call time is precisely truth's inability to coincide with itself' and associating this dilemma with the 'flight' of meaning, and p. 15 (prior version of essay 1973), arguing that rhetoric 'radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration.' Compare Whitman 1991, p. 173, with the discussion and notes below in this section.

¹⁴⁹ See the two volumes edited by Hamacher, Hertz, and Keenan (1988 and 1989), including the first volume, pp. 45 and 286, with de Man's article for *Le Soir* on March 4, 1941. Critical reactions to the discovery of de Man's wartime writing have ranged from acrobatic efforts to obscure his acts of complicity to simplistic condemnations of deconstructionist theory at large. For an overview of part of this range, see Graff 1989, pp. 246–8. In my view a disturbingly evasive and apologetic

later notions of the elusiveness of history and the ambivalence of meaning should be assessed in relation to his acts of wartime complicity remains in dispute. In chapter 20 of this volume, the attempt by de Man to privilege 'allegory' over 'symbol' is discussed by Tobin Siebers in the context of 'organicist' theory in the Nazi milieu. Whatever the factors affecting de Man's own history, the problem of how to assess the kind of history implied by his notion of 'allegory' continues to be a subject of controversy.

For with all the thought-provoking suggestions of 'The Rhetoric of Temporality,' it seems that the very 'need for historical clarification' cited in its opening paragraph has been intensified by the essay itself. It has been argued, for example, that de Man's depiction of the past in the essay does not adequately recognize the extent to which Romantic attitudes toward mutability, even from ironic perspectives, include not only a bleak sense of dissolution, but also a complex sense of progression.¹⁵⁰ It has been observed that while de Man calls representation into question, he tends in the rhetoric of his essay to omit from the inquiry his own representation about 'an authentically temporal destiny' and the 'true voice' of early Romantic literature.¹⁵¹ It has been contended that both in the essay and in de Man's later writing, the very notion of temporal change seems noticeably compromised by his view that the 'allegory' of composition always tells fundamentally the same story about a bafflement to which composition is irrevocably destined.¹⁵² In retrospect, the appeal to 'allegory' in de Man's work and in much poststructuralist writing frequently tends to privilege part of that broad subject as if it were nearly the whole—radically stressing temporal dissolution over strategies of negotiation, textual dissonance over dimensions of resonance, tensions in structure over transactions of sense. Such a view of 'allegory' and history needs itself to be historically situated.¹⁵³ But if it

treatment of de Man marks many of the essays in the 1989 volume, though there are a number of exceptions.

¹⁵⁰ See, e.g., Mellor 1979; compare Seyhan 1992, pp. 148–5.

¹⁵¹ For the quotations, see de Man 1969, pp. 206–07. For critiques, see, e.g., Lentricchia 1980, pp. 291–8; Krieger 1981, esp. pp. 15–18; and Longxi 1994, an article to which David Stern has referred me, esp. pp. 221–5.

¹⁵² The critique is frequently directed not only to de Man's work in particular but also to deconstructionist reading in general. For reservations of this kind even from a perspective sympathetic to certain aspects of such reading, see, e.g., Graff 1989, pp. 248–53; for an argument that de Man tends to turn Benjamin's 'critique of aestheticism' into the 'aestheticization of critique,' see Steinberg 1996b, pp. 5–7.

¹⁵³ Compare Longxi 1994, Teskey 1996, and Kelley 1997.

is critical to scrutinize more intensely the historical forces that enter into the composition of texts—including deconstructionist texts about ‘allegory’—no less critical a need applies to ‘New Historicist’ arguments about imaginative works as ‘allegories’ of underlying ideological structures. For theories of ‘allegory’ are not only themselves historical acts. With their changing definitions and drives, they repeatedly display provocative efforts to construct and reconstruct the process of history itself.¹⁵⁴

* * *

Such considerations do not deny the importance of a sense of timelessness in allegorical interpretation and theory. They rather suggest that from antiquity to the modern period, interpreters and theorists have substantially complicated the claim that allegory as a whole is ‘ahistorical’ in orientation. If over a generation ago the study of those complications frequently tended to concentrate on special cases like typology, in recent decades that study has increasingly extended into the consideration of interpretive attitudes toward textuality at large. Even in the limited period on which I have concentrated, from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, theorists of allegory repeatedly seek to turn the very configurations of texts into expressions of the complexities of time. The conception of such ‘temporalities’ of discourse itself changes from one period to another: the eighteenth-century contrast between the ‘poetic logic’ of primordial humanity and later forms of reason; the Romantic notion of ‘symbolic’ or ‘mythological’ figures as primal images of present and future concerns; the early twentieth-century impression of a language divided by the disjunctions of historical experience; the poststructuralist view of signs inevitably signifying the deferral of significance. Sometimes there is an acute sense in which theories of allegory imply theories of history.

But there is a broader sense in which allegory and history recurrently imply questions about each other. For the historical process has an indirect way of commenting in its turn upon those who aim to interpret it. When a twelfth-century natural philosopher approaching Genesis announces that he will expound ‘the historical sense of the letter’ and leave aside ‘the allegorical and moral reading,’ many may consider his twelfth-century physics to entail a set of interpretive transfers at least as radical as the allegory he leaves aside.¹⁵⁵ But

¹⁵⁴ Compare Whitman 1991.

¹⁵⁵ See the *Treatise on the Works of the Six Days*, attributed to Thierry of Chartres,

not all interpreters may consider themselves closer to the 'historical' sense of Genesis by speculating, as in the eighteenth century, about a fiery explosion from the center of the earth on the third day of creation.¹⁵⁶ Nor will everyone find it persuasive to try to frame the historical sense according to 'historical context,' as in much contemporary analysis, by 'comparing' early texts to elucidate the 'mentality' of the ancient Middle East. No allegory is needed to recognize the importance of including within the history of 'mentalities' the mentalities of historians. This is not to argue that historical and allegorical writing are convertible into each other. It is rather to suggest that the dimensions of allegorical interpretation are too flexible to be wholly reduced to formulas such as 'ahistorical'—or, as discussed earlier, 'imposed,' 'abstract,' and 'closed.' As the diversely oriented essays in this volume show, allegory does exhibit such features at times, but it frequently displays also an expressive, imaginative, and expansive range of operation. By the same token, it should be stressed that any approach to the elusive subject of 'allegory' is itself conspicuously subject to historical change. Such limitations apply all the more to the presentation in this chapter and the first two chapters of this book. That presentation, after all, is not designed to be a 'history.' No doubt some readers will even claim it to be an 'allegory.' Of course I would protest the claims of such allegorists . . . even if by 'allegory' they might mean not that the presentation is timeless, but that it is just one more sign of the times. Even a sign, I would earnestly signal to them, is not necessarily just a sign. And as for times, sometimes, in another of those reveries, I imagine that this volume as a whole may belong not solely to the past. At least for a time—so the reverie continues—it may yet belong to the future of interpretation.

in Häring 1971 (prior version of edition 1955), pp. 553–75, including p. 555 on 'sensum littere hystorialem' and 'allegoricam et moralem lectionem.' Compare the discussion in Whitman 1987a, esp. pp. 187–8, 211–16, 227, 238–9; Dronke 1988, esp. pp. 374–85; and the essay by Winthrop Wetherbee in chapter 10 of this volume. On varying notions of the 'plain sense' of Genesis in particular, see Greene-McCreight 1999; more generally, see the remarks above on the 'literal' sense in chapter 1 (iii), with n. 22, and chapter 2 (viii), with nn. 80–3.

¹⁵⁶ See the discussion in Manuel 1959, p. 137, of the eighteenth-century work by Antonio Lazzaro Moro on crustaceans and the remains of other marine creatures on mountains; compare pp. 135–6 on 'commentators upon Genesis,' the 'new astronomy,' and the 'new physics.'

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For the principles of citation here and in the essay itself, including references to 'prior versions,' see the introductory note to 'Works Cited' in chapter 1.

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C. LATE MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE SIGN SYSTEMS

ALLEGORY AND DIVINE NAMES IN ECSTATIC KABBALAH

Moshe Idel

1. On Interpretive Allegory in Its Philosophic Forms: Jewish Perspectives

Philosophic allegory is one of the most important spiritual resources introduced into the diverse realm of Jewish hermeneutics. Despite Philo of Alexandria's fundamental contribution to such allegorical exegesis in early Christianity, his approach to the Bible was rejected, or at least conspicuously neglected, by rabbinic forms of exegesis as represented in midrashic and talmudic writing. A millennium passed between Philo and the next significant deployment of philosophic allegory in Jewish interpretation. That development occurs in the middle of the eleventh century, with the formative influence of Neo-platonic philosophy in the work of Solomon ibn Gabirol, known in Christian scholastic literature as Avicbron. Few examples of an allegorical approach to the Bible have survived from his writings, and the precise extent of his allegorical exegesis is vague. But there can be no doubt that the new rapprochement between Greek thought and sacred Scripture suggested by his work takes a form quite reminiscent, though probably quite independent, of the ancient encounter exhibited in Philo's allegoresis. Allegorical interpretations by ibn Gabirol are quoted in Abraham ibn Ezra's influential *Commentary on the Torah*, yet as in the case of Philo's interpretations, their impact was marginal. [On allegory in Philo and ibn Gabirol, see chapters 2 (ii, vi) and 4. —ed.]

Only with the more massive absorption of Aristotelian terminology at the end of the twelfth century and its exposition in what became a classic of Jewish thought, Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, did philosophic forms of allegorical interpretation acquire greater acceptance as methods of approaching Jewish canonical writings.¹

¹ On Jewish philosophic allegoresis, see Isaak Heinemann, 'Die wissenschaftliche

To be sure, Aristotelian allegories, even when espoused by such an accomplished Jewish master as Maimonides, did not pass without strong resistance and sometimes even sharp polemics. Indeed, fiery debates, which continued for centuries, accompanied the diffusion of Aristotelian-oriented exegesis. Such critical attitudes may still be discerned late in the eighteenth century, among the opponents to Ḥasidism. Amid the developing controversies, however, allegorical interpretations of this kind were appropriated not only by followers of Maimonides, such as commentators from the ibn Tibbon family, but also by interpreters in other circles, including some of the more conservative ones, among the Kabbalists. The principal example, which will be discussed later in greater detail, is the allegorical exegesis of Abraham Abulafia. But his voice was not exceptional in Kabbalistic circles. Some of the treatments of R. Azriel of Gerona, many of the biblical interpretations of R. Isaac ibn Latif, some of the early writings of R. Moshe de Leon and Joseph Gikatilla—most of these interpreters contemporaries of Abulafia—display strong affinities to Maimonidean allegorizations of biblical texts. Such affinities also mark the approach of one of the most influential Kabbalistic commentators, Rabbi Baḥya ibn Asher, and the work of his master, R. Shelomo ibn Adret (the Rashba), in the *Commentary on the Talmudic Aggadat*. [On Aristotelian philosophy in Maimonidean allegory, see chapter 8; on the orientation of the Rashba, see chapter 9. —ed.]

The extent of the influence of philosophic allegory in Kabbalistic interpretation still awaits a detailed investigation. The subject is fascinating in part because it entails a consideration of the manner in which this exegetical strategy was integrated within the more complex hermeneutical system of the Kabbalists. In general, the medieval philosophers worked with a twofold form of exegesis, divided into the 'plain' sense and the allegorical sense, with the latter sense regarded as esoteric. For many Kabbalists, however, philosophic allegory was already a cultural and spiritual fact, and they had to integrate it within much more intricate designs including additional exegetical dimensions.²

Allegoristik des jüdischen Mittelalters,' *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 23, Pt. 1 (1950–1), 611–43; Frank Talmadge, 'Apples of Gold: The Inner Meaning of Sacred Texts in Medieval Judaism,' in *Jewish Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Green, Vol. 1 (New York, 1986), pp. 338–40; Shalom Rosenberg, 'On Biblical Interpretation in the *Guide of the Perplexed*,' *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 1 (1981), 85–157 [Hebrew].

² See Gershom Scholem, 'Religious Authority and Mysticism,' in Scholem's *On*

How is it possible to account for the indifference, sometimes the rejection, even the sharp criticism displayed by some Jewish thinkers with regard to philosophic allegory, on the one hand, and its later integration, on the other? Clearly, any monolithic answer would be not only a simplification, but also at times a blatant distortion. It would be dangerous to reduce the reticence of hundreds of writers during a millennium and a half of Jewish exegesis to a single major motive. Nevertheless, one observation is unavoidable. To the extent that allegory is the telling of two stories by the use of one medium, allegory would create a universe of discourse that would parallel, and thus compete with, the Holy Scriptures. The plain sense would have to contend with another narrative that derived its conceptual dimensions from a realm of discourse imported from the outside. Insofar as such discourse coincided with Greek philosophic speculation, it would tend to emphasize the abstract, cerebral, natural, or orderly, in contrast to the much more concrete, imaginative, irregular, and voluntaristic approach exhibited in the Bible. As I shall try to show later, even the types of esotericism that inform the two modes of writing are different. Esotericism is much more linguovert in the case of Judaism, where the secrets are very frequently related to texts, *sitrei Torah* ('secrets of the Torah'), whereas in the Greek form of Platonic esotericism, the most influential form of esotericism in the West, the secrets are much more political than textual.

For generations Jewish thinkers encountered alien forms of discourse, whose eidetic structures were different from biblical and midrashic ones. Those encounters convinced many such thinkers that one truth is, or at least should be, shared by various authoritative writings.³ Interpretive allegory was regarded as the principal means of illuminating this alleged 'shared' conceptual universe, and without doubt this form of allegory was an important agent for introducing into Judaism a more nearly universalist kind of discourse.

the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism, trans. Ralph Manheim (1965; rpt. New York, 1969), pp. 5–31; Peretz Sandler, 'On the Question of *Pardes* and the Fourfold Method,' *Sefer Eliahu Auerbach* (Jerusalem, 1955), pp. 222–35 [Hebrew]; A. van der Heide, 'Pardes: Methodological Reflections on the Theory of Four Senses,' *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 34 (1983), 147–59; M. Idel, 'PaRDeS: Some Reflections on Kabbalistic Hermeneutics,' in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany, N.Y., 1995), pp. 249–68.

³ See H.A. Wolfson, 'The Veracity of Scripture from Philo to Spinoza,' orig. pub. 1950, rpt. in Wolfson's *Religious Philosophy: A Group of Essays* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), p. 225.

[On 'universalist' aspects of allegorical and related forms of interpretation, see chapters 10, 12 (introductory remarks and i–iii), and 14–15. —ed.] I use the term 'universalist' because the Greek manner of reasoning has been considered by a very wide intellectual audience to be an ecumenical order of discourse, a view displayed in pagan, Muslim, and Christian writings. Any fundamental spiritual enterprise, however, involves costs, implies dangers, and provokes fears. There is much reductionism in universalism. Allegory can be regarded as a powerful agent of acculturation, but also often as an agent of cultural assimilation. In Jewish allegory, as the *allos* (the 'other') came to be Judaized, so did Jewish elements come to be allegorized. Particularistic trends, so conspicuous in Jewish literature, contributed to the rejection of such procedures.

It may be useful to formulate such cultural and religious fears in the Jewish community in more hermeneutical terms. Interpretive allegory developed in the Hellenistic period when attempts were made to interpret Homeric literature in terms of speculative systems that shared little with the mythology of Greek poets. Those who conceived the *allos* within Greek society were independent, individualistic, and sometimes elitist thinkers. At times such thinkers confronted common religious belief; at times they largely followed another form of logic regarded as 'nature'; at times they even encouraged moments of reconciliation between the domain of publicly accepted myths and the sphere of elitist speculation. In the process, the more linguistic realms of *mythos*, with their national or local specificities exhibited in both written texts and the repetitive forms of oral culture, encountered spiritual systems created and sustained by the mental or cerebral activity of *logos*. Allegory was the claim that Greek myths are but other formulations of philosophic truths exposed by the elite. While philosophic allegory is thus an 'elevation' of *mythos*, which is conceived as an inflection of a fundamental *logos*, it also entails a violent invasion of one form of discourse into another, namely, the imposition of the logocentric onto the linguocentric. The inner tensions, discrepancies, idiosyncracies, and problematics naturally found in revered texts and traditions are not only enriched by allegorical interpretation, but are also 'solved'—that is, simplified. The linguistic 'incoherence' of the imaginative is entrapped in the much more logocentric webs of philosophic 'coherence.' It seems that the official representatives of Greek myths and religions, if there were such authoritative figures in the early Hellenistic period, were sufficiently weak or indifferent not to protest against the 'elevation' of their

mythology to the rank of a hidden philosophy of nature, or that they were perhaps satisfied by such a development. [On efforts in late antique Greek interpretation to reconcile *logos* with mythological language, see chapters 2 (i) and 3. —ed.]

The increasing centrality of the sacred book in Judaism during the Second Temple period brought to the forefront a new class of intellectuals, the *soferim*. They and the later *Pharisees*, who constituted the rabbinic leadership, were bibliocentric and, to a certain degree, linguocentric elites.⁴ Their intellectual project was inclined much more toward disclosure than toward discovery. The book they investigated was written in a language shared by the community, while the idiom scrutinized by the Hellenistic philosophers was much more the silent language of nature or a complex philosophic text studied by a tiny elite. The rabbinic elites sought to transform the Bible into a founding, formative, communal source of inspiration. They aimed to amplify the richness of the 'divine' text either by expanding upon its allegedly implicit meanings through various forms of commentary, or by consciously preserving different and sometimes conflicting interpretations as equally relevant and worthy of study. This was a movement of diversified expansion, rather than deliberate simplification. Pluralism, rather than coherence, distinguished the main efforts of the Rabbis in both the midrashic and the talmudic literatures. It should be stressed that this was a very qualified and restricted expansion, a calculated and controlled pluralism. Nonetheless, it was oriented principally toward collective interpretations that amplified the mythical elements in the Bible instead of reducing them to a coherent system. [On communal activity, interpretive multiplicity, and rabbinic interpretation, see chapters 2 (iii) and 5. —ed.]

One of the factors apparently crucial to such a multiplicity of interpretations was the tendency of these scholars to leave outside their discussions the broad ontological, metaphysical, psychological, and naturalistic presuppositions that presumably nourished their interpretive discourses and to present the results as if they emanated directly from the written text or from oral traditions. Rabbinic Judaism apparently did not develop as the result of deliberate choices of literary genres or elaborate systems of theology, philosophy, astronomy, physics, magic, alchemy, or psychology. This does not mean that

⁴ See Stephen D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy* (Albany, N.Y., 1991).

the Rabbis were unaware of alien forms of thought or that they did not share some of them, or even that they were not inspired by them when operating within the realm of linguistic exegesis.⁵ But the religious importance of the *allos* was either explicitly denied or derided, or was in other cases silently integrated, so that its independent status was considered irrelevant for their exegetical project. The absence of significant philosophic and astronomical terminology in the Talmud and the Midrash is one of the most conspicuous testimonies to the marginalization of structures of thought that potentially competed with rabbinic literature. The matter is quite different with the vast speculative projects of Philo or the more modest ones of ibn Gabirol, Maimonides, or Leone Ebreo. With their deep differences from rabbinic forms of discourse, they are (apparently not incidentally) phenomena of the Diaspora, both in their adoption of speculative systems and in the languages chosen for their allegorical writings.

In this essay I would like to examine one case of the role of philosophic allegoresis within the hermeneutics of one important Kabbalistic school, the school of 'ecstatic' Kabbalah, with its emphasis on the inspired transport of the individual mystic.⁶ Such an investigation may clarify some of the problematics involved in attempts to synthesize an allegorical and a Kabbalistic approach. The principal issue to be investigated involves a linguistic topic, the divine names, which has fundamental importance, or at least formal status, in Jewish literature. As ways to designate the Deity, the linguistic units regarded as divine names represent a particularly sensitive part of sacred language, as is evident from the many interdictions in rabbinic literature concerning their articulation in both written and oral forms. I would like to explore a few Kabbalistic approaches to the status of the divine names, either as they exemplify points of radical scriptural resistance to the allegorical, or as they are allegorized by Kabbalists. [On Kabbalistic attitudes at large toward the terms and 'syntax' of Scripture, see chapter 12 (i). —ed.]

⁵ Recently, important studies of Greek and Jewish forms of hermeneutics have helped to detect some of their resemblances, stemming from common Babylonian sources. See Stephen J. Lieberman, 'A Mesopotamian Background for the So-Called Aggadic "Measures" of Biblical Hermeneutics?' *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 58 (1987), 157–225; Jeffrey H. Tigay, 'An Early Technique of Aggadic Exegesis,' in *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures*, ed. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 169–88.

⁶ For a brief introduction to the distinction between 'ecstatic' and 'theosophical-theurgical' forms of Kabbalah, see M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988), pp. xi–xviii.

It should be emphasized at the start that discussions about various divine names permeate Jewish mysticism in most of its literary forms. To this date neither the immense literary corpus nor even the considerable bibliography has been sufficiently organized to facilitate a comprehensive typology of the use of divine names. In Kabbalistic discourse divine names are variously treated as components of techniques for reaching mystical experiences, as foci of concentration during prayer, as magical devices that sometimes function as talismans, or as formulas for the structure of the universe, the order of language at large, or the substratum of the biblical text. In the limited framework of this essay, I would like to concentrate on some aspects of the hermeneutical attitude that the biblical text consists of a series of divine names. An explication of the hermeneutical principles associated with this view may help to expose and clarify some of the diverse forms of thought involved in the development of Kabbalah. But there is another reason for focusing on this subject. The view that the Bible is composed of divine names has been understood in modern scholarship as reflecting in a quintessential manner the entire Kabbalistic attitude to language.⁷

2. *Torah and Divine Names: Early Medieval Sources*

According to several rabbinic and magical sources, the reception of the Torah by Moses in heaven was preceded by a contest between him and the angels. After Moses succeeded in receiving the Torah, the angels, who had previously opposed God's plan to reveal the Torah to him, gave him some divine names.⁸ Such early medieval Jewish sources thus indicate that the reception of the Torah was

⁷ See Gershom Scholem, 'The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala,' *Diogenes*, 79 (1972), 60, 62, and 'The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala (Part 2),' *Diogenes*, 80 (1972), 165, 193; Isaiah Tishby, *Paths of Faith and Heresy* (Ramat Gan, Israel, 1964), pp. 11–22 [Hebrew].

⁸ The primary and secondary literature on the divine names in Judaism is vast; the following are only a few of the relevant discussions. See Samuel S. Cohon, 'The Name of God, A Study in Rabbinic Theology,' *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 23, Pt. 1 (1950–1), 579–604, and M. Idel, 'Defining Kabbalah: The Kabbalah of the Divine Names,' in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, and Typology*, ed. R.A. Herrera (New York, 1993), pp. 97–122; for the topics discussed below, see especially M. Idel, 'The Concept of the Torah in the Heikhalot Literature and Its Reverberations in Kabbalah,' *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 1 (1981), 26–30 [Hebrew], and E.R. Wolfson, 'The Mystical Significance of Torah Study in German Pietism,' *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 84 (1993), 43–78.

accompanied by the disclosure of divine names. The most important discussion of this subject appears in the preface of a magical book that will later be considered in greater detail:

The Holy One, Blessed Be He, immediately called *Yefeifah*, the prince of the Torah, and he [*Yefeifah*] gave him [Moses] the Torah, 'arranged in its proper order in every detail and innermost part,'⁹ and all the ministering angels became his lovers, and each and every one of them gave him a remedy and the secret of the names, which emerge (*yotze'im*) from each and every pericope, and all their [magical] uses . . . and this is the [magical] usage given to him by the angels, by means of *Yefeifah*, the prince of the Torah, and by Metatron, the Prince of the Countenance. And Moses transmitted it to Eleazar, and Eleazar to his son Pinehas, who is [identical to] Elijah,¹⁰ the High and Respected Priest.¹¹

Several aspects of this text are pertinent to our subject. One is that there is a conspicuous relationship among angels, pericopes of the Pentateuch (portions for the weekly scriptural reading), and their magical uses. It remains unknown whether or not such a nexus was elaborated in ancient Jewish texts, with the aim of offering a comprehensive scheme for the whole biblical text, or whether there was a complete list of fifty-three names of angels corresponding to the number of pericopes in the Pentateuch. What is clear is that the book in which this introductory passage appears, *Sefer Shimmushei Torah* (the book of 'the magical uses of the Torah'), describes 'remedies,' namely, medical and other uses of often incomprehensible names derived from various verses in each of the pericopes of the Torah. It should be noted that this book describes the magical and linguistic secrets received by Moses as transmitted by him to his followers, in a manner reminiscent of the way the *Ethics of the Fathers*, an early rabbinic source, describes the transmission of the Oral Torah. There is an obvious attempt here to provide a pedigree of magical-biblical knowledge, which is also reminiscent of genealogies found in other books of magic in late antiquity.¹² In any case, the

⁹ This expression refers to a magical primordial structure of the Torah, a structure conceived as now inaccessible. See *Midrash Tehilim*, ed. S. Buber (Vilna, 1891), p. 33 [Hebrew]. The affinity between these two early medieval discussions was noticed already by Scholem in 'The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism,' in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, cited above in n. 2, pp. 37–8.

¹⁰ This is a well-known midrashic view.

¹¹ See *Ma'ayan Hokhmah*, printed by A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, Vol. 1 ([1853]; rpt. Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 60–1 [Hebrew].

¹² For attempts by magicians to propose and invent pedigrees, see Hans D. Betz,

last part of the citation makes it clear that Moses's magical lore, involving the 'secret of the names,' has not been lost, but is still available in a book that deals with this topic, like *Shimmushei Torah* itself. It should be stressed that in *Shimmushei Torah* there is no thesis that the entire text of the Torah could or should be transformed into a series of divine names. Only a few selected verses from each pericope are treated as sources of magical names and portents of special power.

This is also the case with a very similar book, *Sefer Shimmushei Tehilim*, a book concerning the 'magical uses of the Psalms.' Each of these books restructures the regular order of the letters of a given verse in order to generate a magical name with extraordinary powers. In other words, a change in the configuration of certain biblical verses reveals another manner of relating to the linguistic material—not only as a means of transmitting a certain type of knowledge or lore, but also as a source of strongly magical power. As regular nouns and verbs shifted to the order of angelic or divine names, the biblical verses traveled dramatically from semantics to magic.

The nature of the relations between these two aspects of the same linguistic material is not clarified in the extant magical sources. Is the magical regarded as more important, because more powerful? Given the fact that the so-called 'prince of the Torah' has revealed one order of the Torah while the other, apparently lower, angels have transmitted the magical and secret aspects of the Torah, what are the implications for the relationship between the plain order and the magical order of the text? Does the hierarchy of angels, which might be taken to suggest that the secret and magical is subordinated to the 'proper order' of the text, imply a similar hierarchy regarding the secret and plain senses? Might such a hierarchy reflect the social context of the imagination of the magically oriented authors who produced the magical books vis-a-vis the rabbinic 'authorities'?

The assumption that powerful names emerge from the verses of the Torah is expressed in the preface to *Shimmushei Torah* by the verb *yotze'im*, which literally means 'go out.' This indicates that a certain linguistic form of exegesis can extract from a regular verse something that is within it. A related view appears in a passage of *Midrash*

'The Formation of Authoritative Tradition in the Greek Magical Papyri,' in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, ed. B.F. Meyer and E.P. Sanders (Philadelphia, 1983), pp. 161–70.

Konen that describes God as opening the Torah and taking out names from it.¹³ From this perspective, the names 'emerge' from the text as from a kind of box in which they are deposited and kept in secret. Such an approach differs in part from that of the preface to *Shimmushei Torah*, where the secrets, while closely related to the scriptural text, are disclosed by angelic figures who teach Moses which verse in the Bible generates the name pertinent for curing a malady or offering a remedy for a particular problem. For its part, *Midrash Konen* conceives the Torah as preexisting creation and as the source—by means of three divine names found in it—of the creative processes. Such an approach might be called 'intratextual,' in the sense that the additional layer of understanding part of the Torah results from a rearrangement of the linguistic units of the text. By contrast, what might be called an 'extratextual' approach involves the introduction of an elaborate nomenclature entailing a conceptualization extraneous to the interpreted text. Some of the implications and complications of this distinction will be considered below.

3. Nahmanides's Two Readings of the Torah

Already among the Jewish masters in the medieval Rhineland, there was a tradition and a practice related to the view that the Torah is a continuum of divine names.¹⁴ In some instances such a view underlies the concepts of certain *halakhic* texts.¹⁵ For Nahmanides in the thirteenth century there were two different traditions regarding the Torah and the divine names in it. One stemmed from *Sefer Shimmushei Torah*; the other, circulating already at the beginning of the thirteenth century in some Jewish circles in Europe, was not yet exemplified in a book that explicated its significance in detail. As Nahmanides puts it in one of his expressions of the two traditions,

The entire Torah is replete with the names of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, and in each and every pericope there is the name by which a certain thing has been formed or by which it has been made or sustained. And in this domain there is a book called *Shimmush Torah*, and

¹³ See *Midrash Konen*, printed by Y.D. Eisenstein, 'Otzar ha-Midrashim (New York, 1928), p. 253, and see Idel, 'The Concept,' cited above in n. 8, 45.

¹⁴ On this issue see Wolfson, 'The Mystical Significance,' cited above in n. 8.

¹⁵ See Idel, 'The Concept,' 54, n. 102.

it provides explication with regard to the pericopes, their [magical] use, and the name that emerges from it [the pericope], and how it emerges, and how to use it [the pericope]. But¹⁶ there is a [secret] tradition to the effect that the names written in that book are much more numerous than those [apparently] written in it, because the Torah, from *Bereshit* [the first word of the Pentateuch] until *le-einei kol Yisrael* [the last words of the Pentateuch], is entirely names, for example, *Berosh Yitbara' Elohim* [the first two words of which are constructed by the separation from the 'conventional' opening word *Bereshit* of its last letters and their augmentation to the beginning of the next word, *bara'*], and others similar to it . . . and from it [the Torah] Moses, our master, blessed be his memory, knew whatever a creature can know and understand.¹⁷

Nahmanides, accordingly, was aware of two somewhat different traditions: one, still extant in *Sefer Shimmushei Torah*, presenting a limited number of magical names; the other, claiming a way of reading the entire Pentateuch as a series of divine names. The radical potential of such 'names' is suggested by his brief example regarding Genesis, which transforms the biblical verb *bara'* ('created,' apparently indicating the transitive act by which God creates the world), into a daring form, *yitbara'*, implying a kind of reflexive creativity within the realm of the divine.

It should be emphasized that Nahmanides does not oppose or criticize the magical aspects of the Torah. He believes that indeed they were known by Moses and, according to the continuation of the above passage, known and also practiced by the 'pious men of the [former] generations.'¹⁸ The passage that most influenced numerous Kabbalists in their conception of the Torah as a continuum of divine names, however, appears in Nahmanides's introduction to his *Commentary on the Torah*. In this introduction, while Nahmanides uses some formulations identical to those in the sermon cited above, he adds some crucial comments. For example, after calling the dictum that the Torah is a continuum of divine names a '[secret] tradition of truth,' he writes that

¹⁶ Hebrew 'Aval. Compare, however, Scholem's assertion that this tradition of Nahmanides also stems from *Sefer Shimmushei Torah*; see 'The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism,' cited above in n. 9, pp. 37–8.

¹⁷ See *Torat ha-Shem Temimah*, in *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, ed. Ch.D. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1961), Vol. 2, pp. 167–8 [Hebrew], and Idel, 'The Concept,' p. 53.

¹⁸ See *Torat ha-Shem Temimah*, p. 168.

it was possible to read it [the Torah] according to the path of the [divine] names; and [alternatively] it [the text] was possible to be read according to our reading [*qeri'ah*], [as a work] concerning the Torah and the commandment; and it [the Torah] was given to Moses according to the path of the division [of the text] for the reading of the commandment; and it was transmitted [also] to him orally according to its reading as [divine] names.¹⁹

By using the term 'reading' (*qeri'ah*) rather than 'emerging,' as in the previous passage, Nahmanides more nearly suggests 'exegetical' activity. Even in this case, however, it is not the human effort to understand the text that conveys its ultimate meaning, but a revelation imparted to Moses. In any event, Nahmanides strongly distinguishes two readings of the Torah. One, based on the regular Masoretic division of the text, reflects an understanding of the Torah as a work that concerns the commandments. With regard to this approach Nahmanides uses the expression 'our reading,' thereby implying a common rabbinic orientation toward biblical texts. The other approach, transmitted orally, concerns the divine names. Though this oral tradition was given to Moses, it has apparently been lost since that time; it is no longer available, at least not in the comprehensive form that would display the entire Torah as a continuum. Even while Nahmanides hints at this oral tradition, which he describes as true, regarding the manner of transforming the entire text into divine names, the sole concrete example he gives in the *Commentary* for such a reading is restricted to three verses (Ex. 14:19–21).

It should be noted that the source which imparted the oral tradition regarding divine names to Moses is quite vague in this discussion. Using a passive form for what 'was transmitted' (*nimsar*) to Moses, Nahmanides leaves unclear the identity of the source. For its part, the *Sefer Shimmushei Torah* attributes to angelic revelation the multiplicity of names imparted to Moses. I would not be surprised if additional sources supported such an interpretation for Nahmanides's own position. The other alternative, that God himself revealed both the Torah and the divine names, certainly remains possible, but it is not yet warranted by an explicit text. The reluctance of this master to speak about a secret tradition is quite important in his overall conception of Kabbalah.

¹⁹ See *Commentary on the Torah*, ed. Ch. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1959), Vol. 1, p. 7 [Hebrew].

For Naḥmanides, in any case, Kabbalistic traditions already revealed may be lost, but not invented. The more playful interpretive approach to the canonical texts frequently found in the rabbinic tradition is thus marginalized by one of the preeminent representatives of rabbinic culture in the Middle Ages. In the sermon previously cited, for example, Naḥmanides cautions:

Let no one deride me because I rely on the calculation of the value of letters called *gematria*, and [let no one] think that it [*gematria*] is a vain exercise, because someone might change the allusion in [scriptural] verses into a pernicious matter by means of *gematria*. The truth is that no one is permitted to deal with numerology [in order to] deduce from [numbers] something that [merely] occurred to his mind. But in the hands of our masters [there was a tradition] that [some] *gematriot* were transmitted to Moses at Sinai, and they are a reminder and a sign of the subjects transmitted orally together with the remaining part of the Oral Torah; some of those [*gematriot*] deal with the subjects of *haggadot* [legends], others with issues of *'issur ve-heter* [prohibition and permission].²⁰

Though the loss of a tradition is not invoked here, the attempt to restrict the free inventiveness of numerological interpretation is obvious.

The fact that Naḥmanides affirms the existence in distant antiquity of a tradition related to divine names but does not claim that it is substantially extant seems to me to have interesting implications. Even if he himself explicitly calls this tradition *qabbalah shel 'emmet* ['Kabbalah of truth'], this is not the mystical tradition that he himself inherited and transmitted, which is presumably much more focused on the theurgical and theosophical dimensions of the Bible. As for the basic difference between the path of names and the path of commandments, they nonetheless have something substantial in common in Naḥmanides's treatment. Both emerge out of the same conglomerate of letters, which were written primordially as a sequence of letters but which could be divided in more than one manner. The principle of this division could not be another text that preceded the Bible; it is rather a matter of revelation. Revelation instructs the legislator regarding the two readings, which are constituted by

²⁰ See Ephrayim Kupfer, 'The Concluding Portion of Naḥmanides's *Torat ha-Shem Temimah*,' *Tarbiz*, 40 (1970), 74 [Hebrew]. On Naḥmanides and *gematria*, see also E.R. Wolfson, 'By Way of Truth: Aspects of Naḥmanides' Kabbalistic Hermeneutic,' *Association of Jewish Studies Review*, 14 (1989), 130–1 and n. 76.

the very act of division. From one perspective, an intratextual approach thus seems to underlie the two readings, since no extratextual, conceptual parallel is systematically invoked to determine the different divisions of the sequence of letters. The claim that any way of reading is 'intratextual,' of course, is always relative to some degree; it would hardly be possible to argue that a given interpretation involves no 'extratextual' reference points, intellectual frameworks, or contextual designs at all. The particular point in this case rather concerns questions of critical emphasis, operational method, and linguistic idiom in the reconstitution of a text. [On questions of the 'position' of interpretation vis-a-vis the text, see chapter 2 (i-iv). —ed.]

To approach the dimension shared in these readings from a more recent critical perspective, it is possible to regard the sequence of letters as a structure interacting with the reader. A 'rabbinically'-oriented mind will perceive in that sequence the source of a ritualistic understanding of the Bible; a mind informed by a secret tradition will perceive in the same letters divine names.²¹ Moreover, the twofold reading of the Bible—with its exoteric, 'plain' sense and its esoteric sense of 'names'—does not entail for Nahmanides an implicit depreciation of the former and an implicit elevation of the latter. In my view, Nahmanides regards the principal content of the Bible as the revelation of the commandments, an orientation suggested by the way he designates Moses as the 'prophet of the commandments.'²² Unlike medieval Jewish philosophers whose allegorical interpretations are often haunted by the danger of a secret preference for intellectual, esoteric meanings in contrast to more historical and ritualistic ones, Nahmanides was less disturbed by such potential implications of his approach.

4. Interpretive Allegory: Between the Path of Commandments and the Path of Names in Ecstatic Kabbalah

For Nahmanides, a sublime but now only partially available tradition of the Torah as divine names is the exclusive patrimony of Moses. Currently extant in only a very fragmentary manner, it is largely

²¹ Cf. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, 1978).

²² See *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, ed. Chavel, cited above in n. 17, Vol. 1, p. 281.

irrelevant for a post-biblical interpretive program. Naḥmanides indicates no opportunity for reconstructing this lost tradition, since such an effort would automatically involve a process of reasoning, which he explicitly banishes from understanding Kabbalah. On the basis of his introduction to the *Commentary on the Torah*, it seems that the sublime 'Kabbalah' which conceived the biblical text as a continuum of divine names was lost forever.

This somewhat 'antiquarian' and conservative approach, however, is notably transformed in a creative manner by another school of Kabbalah, the ecstatic one, in the decades immediately following the death of the Geronese Kabbalist himself. In the writings of Abraham Abulafia and some of his followers, the passage from Naḥmanides's introduction regarding divine names is quoted several times, always in quite positive terms, but without the implied feeling that the details of this tradition are not available. This change is not incidental. It reflects the feeling among these Kabbalists that Naḥmanides, whose writing is explicitly quoted as their source, had offered them an approach to the Torah that is pointedly relevant; indeed, it is the core of their Kabbalah, which is often designated as the 'path of [divine] names.' A divine name of forty-two letters is conceived by Abulafia as derived from the first forty-two letters of Genesis, a sequence that starts with the Hebrew letter *bet* and ends with it.²³ Abulafia associates this 'fact' with the view that 'the entire Torah is [consists of] divine names of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, and this is an intelligible proof for a Kabbalist.'²⁴

Though Abulafia does not explicitly maintain here that he is applying the principle of Naḥmanides, his formulation is identical to that of the Geronese Kabbalist. Yet their broader positions are not the same. When Naḥmanides cites the example of the first biblical verse, he does not claim that the non-conventional division of its opening words is indeed the original reading according to the 'path of names'; he almost treats this division as a kind of retrospective surmise. For Abulafia, by contrast, in some already-existing magical and mystical texts there was a conception of the name of forty-two letters as a divine name. What was regarded by Naḥmanides as lost, at least in part, was retrieved by Abulafia.

²³ See already the interpretation of *Ba'alei ha-Tsafot* on B.T. *Hagigah* 11b.

²⁴ See *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, Ms. Paris BN 777, fol. 108a.

Regarding interpretive allegory in its philosophic forms, Nahmanides himself is quite reticent.²⁵ Though he is indeed acquainted with it, the major thrust of his commentary differs from Maimonides's naturalistic exegesis. For his part, Abulafia combines Maimonidean and Nahmanidean strategies, namely, the path of philosophic allegory and the path of the names. It should be noted that Abulafia was clearly familiar with other writers, independent of these two commentators, whose work overlaps with their approaches. On the one hand, Abraham ibn Ezra's *Commentary on the Torah*, for example, includes a number of allegories; on the other hand, divine names play an important role in the theory and praxis of *Sefer Shimmushei Torah* and the Hasidei Ashkenaz (the 'pious of medieval Germany').²⁶ Nonetheless, the specific formulations of Abulafia clearly demonstrate that he regarded Maimonides and Nahmanides as the cornerstones of his approach to the 'secrets of the Torah'.²⁷

A passage in Abulafia's *Commentary on the Pentateuch* shows how he combines the two strategies to form a kind of interpretive hierarchy:

This knowledge should be taken by the righteous [*tzaddiq*] from the Torah according to its plain sense, in order to perfect his righteousness, but if he wants to become a pious man, he should approach it [the knowledge of the Torah] by means of the philosophic-esoteric sense. However, if he desires to prophesy, he must approach it according to the 'path of the names,' which is the esoteric path, received from the divine intellect. . . . If you want only to be righteous, it suffices for you to follow the paths of the Torah along the path of its plain form. If you wish only to arrive at being pious, it suffices for you to know the secrets of the Torah in the manner of the men of inquiry—together with your being righteous. However, if you want to be prophets, it will suffice to follow the path of the prophets, whose path was to

²⁵ See Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. A. Arkush, ed. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky (Philadelphia and Princeton, 1987), pp. 387–8.

²⁶ Exegetical techniques were displayed in great detail by the Ashkenazi Hasidim; see Joseph Dan, 'The Ashkenazi Hasidic "Gates of Wisdom,"' in *Hommages à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and Ch. Touati (Louvain, 1980), pp. 183–9, and Ivan G. Marcus, 'Exegesis for the Few and for the Many: Judah he-Hasid's Biblical Commentary,' in *The Age of the Zohar*, ed. J. Dan (Jerusalem, 1989), pp. 1–24. In Kabbalah such techniques were adopted in Abraham Abulafia's hermeneutics; see M. Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. M. Kallus (Albany, N.Y., 1989), pp. 95–119, and Idel, 'Abulafia's Secrets of the Guide: A Linguistic Turn,' in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, ed. A. Ivry, E.R. Wolfson, and A. Arkush (Amsterdam, 1998), pp. 289–329.

²⁷ See M. Idel, 'Maimonides and Kabbalah,' in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), pp. 73–4.

combine the [letters of the] entire Torah and to approach it by the path of the holy names, from its beginning to the end, as it [the understanding] reached us in a true Kabbalah regarding it [the path], that 'the entire Torah is [consists of] the names of the Holy One, Blessed Be He'—together with your being perfect in the first two paths.²⁸

In my view, the reading of the Torah in its plain sense corresponds to Nahmanides's 'path of commandments,' which fits the rank of the *tzaddiq*. The last path, defined in terms copied from Nahmanides, is the highest one. Though Nahmanides restricted it to Moses alone, for Abulafia it applies not only to all the prophets of the past, but also to those who strive to become prophets in the present. The second path, the esoteric one of philosophic orientation, is absent in Nahmanides, but very congruent with the way in which Maimonides was understood in the Middle Ages—as an esoteric philosopher. A crucial point in the very last sentence is the cumulative and integrative nature of the prophetic path. The man who aims to become a prophet must still be both a thoroughly righteous man and a pious man, that is, a philosopher. Philosophic understanding of the Torah as exhibited in allegory is not a stage to be transcended by aspirants to prophecy, but an approach to be maintained even as they travel on the path of the prophets. [On medieval Jewish controversies regarding the relation between philosophic and other forms of interpretation, see chapters 8 and 9; on such controversies in the Islamic and Christian communities, see chapters 7 and 10. —ed.]

As this passage suggests, philosophic understanding of the Torah involves the attainment of supremacy in knowledge. It entails, as in the view of Maimonides, the state of purified understanding of God, which is the condition for uniting with him or receiving a message from him. Between the regular religious acts of the righteous and the mystical moments of prophecy—that is, ecstasy—Abulafia gives a secure position to the contemplative ideal, which includes the allegorical understanding of the Bible. The insertion of interpretive allegory between Nahmanides's path of commandments and the path of names is far from mechanical. As will be seen in the discussion below, the allegorical approach did not always remain a separate technique, but was sometimes combined with the path of names. Perhaps more importantly, the allegorical process radiated into

²⁸ See *Maṣṣeḥ ha-Hokhmot*, Ms. Moscow-Guensburg 133, fols. 7b–8a. See also a very similar discussion on fol. 12b.

Abulafia's perception of Naḥmanides's paths. Thus, for example, Abulafia's attitude toward the meaning of the commandments is significantly different from that of the Geronese master; it is far closer to a Maimonidean, intellectualistic understanding of Jewish ritual. No less interestingly, in the work of Abulafia philosophic esotericism intersects with the other form of Jewish esotericism: the linguistic one.

5. *Interpretive Allegory and the 'Path of Names'*

For Abulafia, the allegorical understanding of the Torah precedes the prophetic 'reading' and is required for its attainment. But how did the ecstatic Kabbalist understand the relationship between the two approaches as exegetical techniques? Discussing a biblical story, Abulafia argues that when its various facets

are taken within the philosophic approach, [they] become related to each other in a general manner, and not in all particulars. Whereas according to the methods of Kabbalah not one letter is left without being used.²⁹

According to the Kabbalist, the movement from a philosophic form of allegory to Kabbalistic techniques of interpretation involves a gain in textual understanding. Dealing with broad concepts, philosophic allegory entails understanding the relations among various elements in a biblical pericope in a general manner, leaving some elements of the text beyond its exegetical scope. Only Kabbalistic exegesis, according to Abulafia, wholly engages the plenitude of the text. Such exegesis includes every textual idiosyncrasy; in the Kabbalist's strong expression, 'not one letter is left without being used.'

It is worth exploring in greater detail the possible implications of such a statement. A hyperliteralistic³⁰ approach inspires Kabbalistic exegesis in the Abulafian manner. [For various notions of the 'literal' sense, see chapters 1 (iii), 2 (viii), and 11. —ed.] For Abulafia, the letters or the names in the biblical text are not primarily an authoritative source for religious behavior, as is Naḥmanides's 'path

²⁹ See *Maṣleḥ ha-Hokhmot*, Ms. Moscow-Guensburg 133, fol. 25a.

³⁰ See Daniel C. Matt, "'New-Ancient Words': The Aura of Secrecy in the Zohar," in *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism 50 Years After: Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism*, ed. P. Schäfer and J. Dan (Tübingen, 1993), pp. 200–02.

of commandments,' nor are they principally a magical resource, as is possibly the 'path of names' in Nahmanides's conception. They are fundamentally a source of experience. The minute examination of the text, its dissection into its constituent letters, their rearrangement so as to constitute new formulas—such activity simultaneously exhibits an extreme dedication to the text and offers an opening for great creative freedom. The need to take every letter into consideration, unlike the approach of philosophic allegory, may produce paralyzing moments. But the 'exegete' enjoys an expansive opportunity to manipulate the text, so that it is quite possible to construct a 'Kabbalistic interpretation' in more than one way.

The ecstatic Kabbalist vividly articulates this opportunity. Discussing two pericopes that are 'comprised together according to the plain sense,' he indicates that in addition to commentary according to the way of 'wisdom' (i.e., philosophy), it is necessary to discuss the issue also 'according to the [path of] names.'

However, should we approach this path according to what we have received from it, [as dealing with] the forms of the names, and the combinations, and *gematria*, and *notarikon*, and those like them from the paths of Kabbalah, we would not be able to write all these matters that we have received by this Kabbalistic path related to the knowledge of the names, even if all the heavens were parchments, and all the seas ink, and all the reeds pens, and all the beams fingers, and every moment of our days as long as the years of Methuselah. This is all the more the case since there are [Kabbalistic] paths that we have not received, and we do not know anything about them.³¹

As indicated in this luxuriant, almost 'Rabelaisian' passage, Kabbalah for Abulafia consists in innumerable interpretive techniques, each of which provides a certain detailed and comprehensive treatment of the text. This is why, even in a Kabbalistic commentary on the Torah, the Kabbalistic exegete can offer only a few of the infinite number of Kabbalistic interpretations.³² The Kabbalah based on divine names is thus not a forgotten or fragmentary lore, a closed corpus, but rather an open interpretive field, which is in a sense expanding with each additional effort of a Kabbalist to understand the details of a text.

³¹ See *Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, Ms. Moscow-Guensburg 133, fol. 20ab. See also Abulafia's *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, ed. A. Jellinek in *Philosophie und Kabbala* (Leipzig, 1854), Vol. 1, pp. 3–4, discussed in Idel, *Language*, cited above in n. 26, pp. 100–01.

³² See M. Idel, 'Infinities of Torah in Kabbalah,' in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. G. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven, 1986), pp. 141–57.

A feature shared by all the Kabbalistic techniques of exegesis mentioned in this passage is their intratextual dimension; that is, they exploit the 'literal' resources of the text without explicitly importing from the start certain 'framing' issues to organize the various words of the text, as in philosophic allegory. Radical and eccentric as these forms of 'exegesis' may be, they nonetheless rely on the potential inherent in the linguistic texture of the work. While the contents displayed by the allegorical approach can be exhausted, the Kabbalistic ones are conceived as inexhaustible. In this respect Abulafia, as a Kabbalist, suggests the orientation of midrashic reading, as he does also in reworking (though in an exaggerated manner) statements in rabbinic sources. [On the 'openness' of midrashic reading, see chapter 5. —ed.] Yet the *intertextuality* of Midrash, which is closer in certain respects to the kind of interaction that is discussed in modern deconstructionist theory, differs from Abulafia's *intratextual* emphasis, which is less susceptible to the morphemic aspects of the text, its conventionally meaningful 'units.' For all their differences, the midrashic, the allegorical, and the deconstructionist approaches—as well as the kind of Kabbalistic approach that is often called 'symbolic'³³—resort to certain forms of narrative, because they normally tend to preserve the grammatical functions of the words in the texts under consideration. With the intratextual emphasis of Abulafia, however, such an orientation is substantially qualified. His repeated reliance on smaller linguistic units of articulation, the phonemes, tends to undermine conventional plots and normative concepts. Reconstructing the deconstructed text out of the phonemes, he is able to employ all the original letters or their interpretive substitutes in the altered texture of the new composite work.

A comment by Abulafia about the three angels whose encounter with Abraham involves a revelation of the future helps to clarify the relation between the ecstatic Kabbalist's overall orientation and philosophic allegory. The issue of prophecy, he indicates, has already been clarified in Maimonides's

Guide of the Perplexed and other books of wisdom [i.e., philosophy] in a manner sufficient for those who want to know them, if they will peruse them carefully. And the men of speculation [i.e., the philosophers]

³³ For some reflections about this kind of Kabbalah, see M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, cited above in n. 6, pp. 200–34.

would apply the names of the forefathers³⁴ to the human intellect, and the rest of the names would refer to the powers beneath it [the human intellect], some closer to it and some further away. They would refer everywhere to the Tetragrammaton and other divine names as designations of the Agent Intellect.³⁵

Interpreting allegorically, philosophers treat the names of both the forefathers and God as references to different forms of the intellect—the human one and the separate, cosmic, ‘Agent Intellect.’ Such extratextual interpretation is quite reductive, transforming particulars into general categories. Indeed, the allegorist may not be able to explain why the intellect or God is designated by one biblical term or another. As the notion of ‘intellect’ is universalist in character—after all, the intellect in both its human and cosmic forms is transnational and transmundane—it transcends the specific designations in scriptural texts. In fact, a better understanding of the dramas associated with these intellects can be acquired in Averroistic treatises on the intellect, which helped to inspire some of Abulafia’s own psychological allegories. The allegorical sense of the biblical text is thus drawn not only from another set of texts, philosophic in character, but also from texts written originally in another language, derived often from another culture, and oriented toward a much more unified and simplistic theory of values.

What seems even more striking in the allegorical approach described above is the absence of God. His names are allegorized as signifying the Agent Intellect, and the entire spiritual enterprise takes the form of an intellectual affair, involving relations between the human and separate intellects. In fact, at times in this kind of exegesis it is quite difficult to distinguish between these intellects, and sometimes even between them and God, in view of the attitude that the spiritual realm is continuous. This orientation, adopted also by Abulafia in some discussions, tends to transform the variety of biblical stories into a restricted design of intellectual events. This extreme psychologization is ‘remedied’ by the radical emphasis on divine names in the ‘path of the names.’ While the allegorist speaks about very important and positive psychological events, he nonetheless deals with a

³⁴ On interpretations of the names of the forefathers in Abulafia, see M. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. J. Chipman (Albany, N.Y., 1988), pp. 127–8.

³⁵ See *Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, Ms. Moscow-Guensburg 133, fol. 23b, with Idel, *Language*, p. 111.

'lower God,' a liability transcended by the deployment of Kabbalistic discourse. The ecstatic Kabbalist's higher form of interpretation forcefully reintroduces the divine into the spiritual activity designated by him as prophecy.

In the same context Abulafia offers an example of allegorical interpretation that corroborates his argument. The 'men of speculation'

have determined that the name 'Lot' is a symbol for the material intellect and that his two daughters and wife refer to the material realm. And we are instructed that the angels are the advisors of the intellect. They are the straight paths that advise the intellect to be saved from the evil ones, which refer to the limbs [of the body], whose end is to be consumed in sulphur and heavenly fire—this is the full extent of the parable. This is in accord with what they say, that the Torah would not have deemed it important to relate such a matter, even in the event that it actually did occur, for what is the point of such a story for the man of speculation?³⁶

Aiming to 'save' the 'embarrassing' canonical text from the semi-mythological story and confer upon it an aura of philosophic content, the allegorical exegete invokes a kind of 'soul-struggle,' a *psychomachia*. [On some ways of invoking a *psychomachia* in early Christian and Islamic allegory, see chapters 6 and 7. —ed.] Allegory of this kind saves the text from its apparent meaning by applying another meaning that derives from an idiom alien to the original text. Unlike the intertextual emphasis in Midrash, such extratextual interpretation substitutes for the 'archaic' or 'antiquated' apparent sense of the interpreted work another sense.

In the remarks that immediately follow this passage, Abulafia offers a typology of philosophic attitudes toward such scriptural language that rather convincingly express such uneasiness with the plain sense.

Indeed it is conceivable in only one of three ways: either it is construed in its plain sense, or it may be a parable, or it occurred to Abraham in a dream in the manner of prophecy.³⁷

Despite the different alternatives, the implications for the plain sense in this case are clear. Either it is preserved, in which case the philosopher has nothing to learn from such an obsolete story, or the story itself is not historical, in which case the canonical text is to be

³⁶ See the passage in *Mafleah ha-Hokhmot* cited in Idel, *Language*, p. 111.

³⁷ See Idel, *Language*, p. 111.

investigated for deeper meanings. Such an investigation can involve an allegorical transformation of the text into veiled philosophic discourse, in the manner just described, or an association of the story with the realm of prophecy or prophetic dreams.

And if it is a prophetic dream, or a prophecy itself, it is worthy of being written in order to instruct the prophets in the methods of prophecy, and what may be derived from them regarding divine conduct, and in any case the prophet will be able to see in it parables and enigmas.³⁸

This last approach, paralleling the path of the names, may offer an insight into how to reach a prophetic experience or to know God. Indeed, Abulafia indicates that the 'explanation of the Kabbalist is that they are all names and therefore worthy of being recorded.'³⁹ Abulafia is not worried by an 'obsolete' meaning, and he does not 'resolve' the problem of meaning by the form of substitution displayed in philosophic allegory. This is not to say that he imagines the Kabbalistic approach to entail no interpretive 'transfer' of its own from the conventional meaning. For Abulafia, that approach rather insures the 'elevation' of the scriptural text to the supreme status of a continuum of divine names.

In discussing that continuum Abulafia specifies a kind of interpretive activity that is suggestive of his version of intratextuality.

Indeed, every Kabbalist will invoke the Name in all places [it occurs] as instructed by means of any of the divine attributes, because this is true and right, and this is the reason why it is necessary to inquire into names and to know, [regarding] each and every one of them, to what attribute it points, because the attributes change in accordance with each and every issue. And it is known that God does not at all possess attributes that will change from one to another, but the attributes change in accordance with the nature⁴⁰ of the creatures that are [necessarily] emanated from them.⁴¹

While the philosophic allegorist reduces the plethora of divine or proper names to a single principle (i.e., the intellect) with different dimensions, the ecstatic Kabbalist claims that different names imply the variety of creatures that are emanated from God. Although no

³⁸ See Idel, *Language*, p. 111.

³⁹ See Idel, *Language*, p. 111.

⁴⁰ In the original, *lefi mishpat*, which normally means 'according to the judgment.'

⁴¹ See *Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, Ms. Moscow-Guensburg 133, fols. 23b–24a.

attributes change on high—a critical hint regarding some forms of theosophical Kabbalah—modulating conditions are projected upon the divine realm as a result of differences in the nature of creatures. From this perspective the various names are not cases of redundancy; they should not be reduced to synonyms, but respected in their singularity, in order to discover the plenitude on high. Far more than the philosophic allegorist, the Kabbalist stresses the need to preserve the textual multiplicity of names. This concern with particulars inspires, at least in principle, the ethos of the ‘path of names.’ It is not so much ‘meaning’ as textual detail that acquires a kind of absolute status in this linguovert approach.

6. *An Allegorization of Nahmanides’s Stand*

Philosophic allegory has a valuable but limited role in the overall hermeneutical system of Abulafia. In a progression of seven interpretive methods in that system, he gives it the fourth position. For one of his disciples, however, such allegorical exegesis seems to possess a somewhat greater importance.

Belonging to the ecstatic school of Kabbalah, this Kabbalist, R. Nathan ben Se‘adyah, composes toward the end of the thirteenth century the work *Sefer Sha‘arei Tzedeq*, which discusses in some detail the origins of the esoteric tradition (*ha-Qabbalah*), with its communication of a divinely authorized language. According to *Sha‘arei Tzedeq*, the esoteric tradition, beginning with Adam and passing through figures such as Noah and Abraham, eventually reaches Moses, who receives it in Egypt from his father. With the revelation at Sinai, God himself introduces Moses into ‘the inmost secrets of the science of the letters.’ With this understanding, Moses arranged the Torah

as a continuum of letters, which is [i.e., which continuum corresponds to] the path of [divine] names, which reflects the structure of the letters on high; and [then] he divided it [the text of the Torah] in accordance with the reading of the commandments, which reflects the essence of the structure of the lower entities.⁴²

⁴² See *Sefer Sha‘arei Tzedeq*, ed. Y.E. Porush (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 29; cf. the discussion in Idel, *Language*, p. 17. On the passage at large, see Georges Vajda, who translated it into French in an appendix to his article, ‘Un chapitre de l’histoire du conflit entre la Kabbale et la philosophie: la polémique anti-intellectualiste de Joseph

In terms that recall Nahmanides's introduction to the *Commentary on the Torah*, the author of *Sha'arei Tzedeq* also distinguishes between two readings of the Torah, one according to the 'path of names,' the other according to the 'path of commandments.' Unlike Nahmanides, however, he refers the two forms of reading to a certain ontological distinction. The 'path of names' reflects a metaphysical realm; the 'path of commandments,' a physical one.

Since the composition of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, followers of Maimonides had used the distinction between metaphysics and physics to treat philosophically the long-standing distinction between two central subjects of Jewish esoteric speculation. One of those subjects was the 'Work of the Chariot' (*Ma'aseh Merkavah*, involving the mystical vision in the first chapter of Ezekiel). The other was the 'Work of the Beginning' (*Ma'aseh Bereshit*, involving the account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis). In the Aristotelian approach of the *Guide*, the first subject concerned the realm of eternal being; the second, the realm of generation and corruption. It is possible, as some Kabbalists hint in retrospect, that the distinction articulated by Nahmanides in the thirteenth century between two paths of reading the Torah is related to the early distinction between the 'Work of the Chariot' and the 'Work of the Beginning.'⁴³ Whether Nahmanides's understanding of those two subjects is indebted to Maimonides's philosophic interpretation of them, however, remains a question. In a previous study I have argued that the two paths of Nahmanides allude 'symbolically' to two divine attributes (*Sefirot*) in theosophic Kabbalah.⁴⁴

By contrast, an account more closely related to the distinction between metaphysics and physics in *Sha'arei Tzedeq* is Abulafia's distinction between two kinds of divine names: those that are 'not combined' and those that are 'combined.' According to Abulafia, the first kind—involving the order of the letters in their pure form and exhibiting entities that do not perish—belongs to the 'Work of the

b. Shalom Ashkenazi, 'Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge', 23 (1956), 131–2. On part of the passage and its possible affinity to a view of Dante's, see Umberto Eco, *La recherche de la langue parfait* (Paris, 1994), pp. 66–7. The possibility of at least an indirect connection between Abulafia's and Dante's views on language is strengthened by the fact that Abulafia's former teacher R. Hillel of Verona spent some years in Forlì, a place where Dante lived during part of his exile. I hope to return to this issue in a separate study.

⁴³ See Idel, 'The Concept,' cited above in n. 8, 55–6, n. 107.

⁴⁴ See 'The Concept,' 55–6, on the *Sefirot* of *Hokhmah* and *Binah*.

Chariot'; the second kind—involving the order of the letters not in their original sequence and exhibiting entities that are transient—belongs to the 'Work of Creation.'⁴⁵ For his part, the author of *Sha'arei Tzedeq* also uses the philosophic distinction to allegorize the two paths of Nahmanides. The 'path of names' exhibits the transcendent world; the 'path of commandments,' the lower one. Kabbalah and philosophic allegory are strikingly implicated with each other.

This is not to say that philosophy itself reaches the highest stage of understanding. In another passage in *Sha'arei Tzedeq*,⁴⁶ R. Nathan aligns philosophy with the 'laws of nature' and the 'attribute of judgment.' Those who act according to this attribute, he argues, do not understand the 'world of names,' which is associated with the 'letters on high.' Yet even in the priority he ascribes to the 'world of names,' which he aligns with the 'attribute of mercy,' R. Nathan (like Abulafia before him) differs in emphasis from Nahmanides. For the ecstatic Kabbalist, the world of names is not conceived as a lost tradition, but is connected to an everlasting reality, which, although obscured at present, will be repossessed with the return of prophecy in the messianic period.⁴⁷ Indeed, for the author of *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, the 'divine names' tradition can be acquired in his own lifetime.

For R. Nathan ben Se'adyah presents the history of Kabbalah with an orientation conspicuously different from the approach of Nahmanides, and even partially different from the approach of Abulafia. According to Nahmanides, the path of names is revealed to Moses and largely forgotten after him. According to the author of *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, Kabbalah goes back beyond Sinai to an Adamic revelation; despite its esotericism, it thus has a more clearly universalist status. More daringly, the author states that before Moses was initiated into the secrets of Kabbalah, he had already learned in Egypt 'many sorts of alien lore'⁴⁸—that is, philosophic and scientific teaching. This remark is quite unusual in Kabbalistic literature, and it should be understood on more than one plane. From a 'historical' perspective, it presents Moses as in part, at least initially, a product of Egyptian culture. [On the notion of using 'Egyptian' lore in Christian contexts, see the introduction to chapter 12 and chapter 15. —ed.] From a 'contemporary' perspective, the fact that Moses's

⁴⁵ See *Sefer Hotam ha-Haftarah*, translated in Idel, *Language*, pp. 18, 52.

⁴⁶ See Idel, *Language*, p. 18.

⁴⁷ See *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, p. 17, and Idel, *Language*, pp. 24–7.

⁴⁸ See *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, p. 29.

study of alien lore—in the medieval Jewish community, a derogatory term for philosophy—did not preclude him from receiving Kabbalah indicates that there is no unbridgeable gap between the two forms of thought. Indeed, the succinct autobiography of this Kabbalist indicates that he himself had studied and become immersed in philosophy before becoming a Kabbalist, and I see his description of Moses as a certain *apologia pro vita sua*. The encounter with philosophy is by no means an exception among the intellectuals of the secondary elite who play a major role in the emergence of creative forms of Kabbalah. In view of the fact that Moses is the model for the accomplished mystic, it may well be that for the author of *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, the study of philosophy before the study of Kabbalah is no historical accident, either for Moses or for him, but rather part of an ideal curriculum. In their own ways, both Abulafia and this author treat philosophic allegory not as an incident in the cultural history of Judaism, but as a necessary and positive development in the movement toward prophecy.

7. Allegorical Composition and Divine Names

The scope of allegory is not limited to interpretive acts; it also includes compositional forms. In the passages discussed above and in a host of other writings, including numerous Jewish philosophic works and some Kabbalistic ones, allegory is a way of interpreting texts composed by authors to whom contemporary scholarship would not normally attribute such allegorical designs. It appears that relatively few Jewish treatises are actually composed as allegories from the outset.

During a period that includes the last decades of the thirteenth century, when the *Zohar* is composed in Spain as a 'symbolic' text, Abraham Abulafia writes in Italy and Sicily a series of 'prophetic writings,' revelations to which Abulafia himself provides allegorical interpretations. In my view, only rarely do these philosophic interpretations constitute merely marginal, subsequent additions to the initial literary and intellectual structures of these texts. Normally they explicate conceptual elements encoded within the texts from the start. As yet there has been little scholarly analysis of this literary and hermeneutical dimension of Abulafia's work. Most of the 'prophetic books' themselves have disappeared; only Abulafia's own 'commentaries' on the lost works are available; and the sole original prophetic text extant, a poetically oriented treatise called *Sefer ha-Ot* (the book

of the 'letter' or the 'sign'), is not accompanied by a commentary. Still, in some measure it remains possible to investigate the intersection of allegorical composition and interpretation in Abulafia's work, since at times the commentaries quote phrases from the original prophecies before interpreting them. [On other forms of convergence between allegorical composition and interpretation, see chapters 2 (vii), 10, and 16. —ed.]

A case in point is Abulafia's commentary on a book relating a revelation he received in Rome in 1280. The revelation includes an account of the anointment of a 'king over Israel,' an inauguration associated with the 'New Year' in the 'Temple' and with designations of divine and 'corporeal' names for the anointed one.⁴⁹ Since antiquity, of course, the general notion of the installation of a king whose anointment and coronation marks his deification had been a widespread motif. In the literature of mysticism, the association between a decisive transformation of spirit and a divine transference of names had ancient precedents of its own. Early Jewish mystical writing, for example, includes an account of how the exemplary mystic, Enoch, becomes an angelic being named Metatron and receives divine names. But Abulafia's composition apparently concentrates neither on the deification of a king as a figure of flesh and blood nor on the corporeal translation of a body into the heavens, but on the spiritualization of man, his union with God in intellectual activity that redeems himself. That revelatory act is in turn interpretively 'revealed' by Abulafia's allegorical commentary on his own composition. [On the 'revelation' of 'revelation' in ancient Midrash, see chapter 2 (iii). —ed.]

In certain respects the congruence between story and commentary operates on the very level of letters and words. Abulafia constructs a series of 'equivalences' between terms in the 'original' composition and terms in his interpretation by the technique of *gematria*, based on the numerical values conventionally associated with Hebrew letters. For example, he glosses the original phrase *rosh meshihi* ('the head of my anointed one') as *hayyei ha-nefashot* ('the life of the souls'),

⁴⁹ See *Sefer ha-'Edut*, Ms. Rome-Angelica 38, fols. 14b–15a; Ms. Munich 285, fol. 39b; see also Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, cited above in n. 34, pp. 126–7, 199. The Hebrew version of this book (Jerusalem, 1988) includes the Hebrew original of the passage; see pp. 110–11, 154.

and immediately thereafter associates the original phrases *u-ve-Rosh ha-Shanah* ('and on the New Year') and *u-ve-Beit ha-Miqdash* ('and in the Temple') with the notion of *koah ha-nefashot* ('the power of the souls'). For *each* of these phrases in both the original composition and the interpretation, the combined numerical value of the letters is exactly 869. Similarly, he interprets the original phrase *timshehehu ke-melekh* ('anoint him as a king') with reference to *mi-koah kol ha-she-mot* ('with the power of all the names'); in each case, the combined numerical value is again 869. The point of this meticulous arrangement lies not just in its numerological virtuosity. It lies more deeply in the allegorical effort to transmute an ancient 'mythological' narrative about the installation of a king into a contemporary, spiritualized account of mystical experience, in which human consciousness is elevated by the 'power' of the 'names.'

Allegory of this kind involves an attempt to make a compositional act intersect with an interpretive one within the texture of language itself. Such a process of linguistic interplay differs from the operation of much Jewish philosophic allegory in the Middle Ages, which often depends upon the application of terminology from Arabic and Maimonidean sources. By contrast, Abulafia seeks with the very letters of his composition to 'send' the reader to his exposition. It remains the case, of course, that other structures (e.g., numerological ones) underlie the evaluation of those letters. But the self-conscious concern of Abulafia to 'integrate' his commentary with the terms of his story displays the intratextual emphasis of his work.

The philosophic dimensions of that work are nonetheless far-reaching. Immediately after his reference to the power of the names, Abulafia returns to the original text ('For I have anointed him as a king over Israel') and interprets *Yisra'el* ('Israel'), with its *qehillot* ('communities'), as the *mitzvot* ('commandments'). The numerical value of each of these three words is 541, a particularly important number in Abulafia's writings, since it is the *gematria* of the Hebrew expression commonly used for the Agent Intellect (*Sekhel ha-Po'el*).⁵⁰ The Agent Intellect is the cosmic principle that informs all cognitive processes in this world, and for both Maimonides and Abulafia it often represents the source of prophecy. In effect, Abulafia treats the

⁵⁰ In the context of this particular passage from *Sefer ha-'Edut*, see Ms. Munich 285, fol. 39a.

anointment of the king over 'Israel' as the process by which the exemplary individual acquires the cosmic, comprehensive insight that promotes prophecy and redemption.⁵¹

For the ecstatic Kabbalist that redemption has an intensely personal dimension. Referring to the expression *ha-shem ha-gashmi* ('the corporeal name'), Abulafia writes that the secret of that name is *meshiah ha-Shem* ('the anointed [from a more soteriological perspective, the 'messiah'] of the Name'), and he proceeds to cite the expression, *yismah Moshe* ('Moses will rejoice'). Each of these expressions has a numerical value of exactly 703;⁵² each includes the three Hebrew consonants *H*, *Sh*, and *M* (*Ha-SheM* or *MoSheH*).⁵³ Some of the implications of this configuration are clarified slightly later in the same work:

MoSheH knew God [*Ha-SheM*] by means of the name [*Ha-SheM*], and God [*Ha-SheM*] also knew *MoSheH* by means of the name [*Ha-SheM*].⁵⁴

The articulation of the 'name' is the medium by which Moses and God know each other, a communion that produces a redemptive figure.⁵⁵ But that kind of figure is not just 'Moses,' nor is he the only individual to express the 'name.' For the process of articulating and expounding and permuting and construing and transposing

⁵¹ In a more detailed analysis it would be possible to examine other potential implications of the passage. For example, Abulafia and some other Kabbalists with overlapping views often interpret the consonants in *Yisra'el* as *yesh ra'al*, i.e., 'there are' (*yesh*) '231' (the numerical value of *ra'al*). The figure 231 represents all the possible combinations of two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, as described in some versions of the influential *Sefer Yetzirah*, and the technique of combination has mystical and magical valences. By forming and reciting those 231 combinations, one could create a *golem* (i.e., vivify a clay form shaped like a human) or reach a prophetic experience. From one perspective, the treatment in *Sefer ha-'Eduṭ* of the anointment of the exemplary individual—suggesting the descent of oil upon the head—implies the descent of the ideas or forms from the Agent Intellect onto the mind of the prophet. The messianic implications of such an interplay of individual, intellect, and prophecy are further suggested by an important passage in another work of Abulafia, which associates the notion of the 'messiah' with 1) the person of the historical messiah (paralleling the path of the righteous); 2) the human intellect (paralleling the path of the philosophers); and 3) the Agent Intellect (paralleling the path of the prophets). On messianic implications of the passage in *Sefer ha-'Eduṭ*, see my discussion below.

⁵² The same numerical value applies to the expression *hamishah yetzarim* ('five urges') that appears in this passage.

⁵³ For clarification of Abulafia's approach I have provided at this point a 'full' English transliteration of the Hebrew name *Moshe*.

⁵⁴ See *Sefer ha-'Eduṭ*, Ms. Munich 285, fol. 39b.

⁵⁵ Cf. the divine declaration shortly before the reference to *ha-shem ha-gashmi*: 'and his name I have called *Shaddai*, like my name.'

redemptive names is what Abraham Abulafia himself is repeatedly performing in this very allegory.⁵⁶ One who 'started to contemplate the essence of the anointed one' [the 'messiah'], writes Abulafia, is 'Raziel'—a name that has the same numerical value (248) as 'Abraham' and that Abulafia repeatedly uses to refer to himself. From one perspective, after all, the source of this 'revelation' is the Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia, who provocatively claimed to be a messiah.⁵⁷ From another perspective, perhaps it would be preferable to expand the scope of this Kabbalistic source, in view of Abulafia's emphasis on the union between the human and the divine. As the divine voice in his own composition declares about the anointed one, 'he is I and I am he,'⁵⁸ upon which Abulafia comments: 'and it cannot be revealed more explicitly than this.'

In this work of Abulafia, allegory is not only a compositional technique and an interpretive device. In a more eminent sense, it is also an esoteric way to understand his own mystical achievement and his redemptive role in the historical process. Such writing, which might be called 'spiritual allegory,' strikingly articulates Abulafia's sense of himself as a messiah and a prophet. While Abulafia's allegorical writing is often an expression of the general struggle of the human soul in an atemporal context, for him it is thus also an intensive form of self-expression, a revelation of his own soul at critical moments in time.

⁵⁶ In this regard it should be noted that for Abulafia, the expression *ha-shem ha-gashmi* stands for the name of Moses and the names of the forefathers (including the name 'Abraham'), which become divine names by means of a complex linguistic transformation; see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 127–8.

⁵⁷ In the continuation of the passage, Raziel designates the 'messiah' as *David ben David* ('David the son of David'), whose secret is *yimelokh* ('he will reign'), a term associated with *lev ha-navi* ('the heart of the prophet'). Earlier in the passage God indicated the anointment of Abulafia as a king, and Raziel here pointedly refers to 'David' as the name of the 'messiah.' It may be that the other 'David' is the Agent Intellect, so that 'David the son of David' would indicate the union between the individual and cosmic intellects. It should also be noted that each of the three Hebrew expressions cited above (with *David* written in a plene form, with a *yod*, and *yimelokh* written in a defective form, without a *vav*) has the numerical value of exactly 100, and that earlier in the passage, a dramatic divine expression about the anointed one—*ve-Anokhi hu* ('and I am he,' cited in my discussion below)—has the numerical value of 99, a figure that for the Kabbalists is practically identical to 100. Such patterns intensify the self-referential aspect of this 'messianic' passage for Abulafia.

⁵⁸ For similar expressions in the work of Abulafia and his followers, see M. Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany, N.Y., 1989), pp. 11–12, and Idel, 'On Symbolic Self-Interpretations in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Writings,' *Hebrew University Studies in Literature and the Arts*, 16 (1988), 90–6.

8. *Concluding Remarks*

In ecstatic Kabbalah, allegory is not an alien form of discourse. On the contrary, it is an important way of interpreting the Torah, reassessing certain post-biblical Jewish esoteric traditions, and even constructing Kabbalistic compositions. From this point of view, there is no radical difference between the allegorization by Maimonides of ancient, Jewish esotericism and the allegorization by ecstatic Kabbalists of Jewish canonical writings. In any event, the powerful movement of philosophic allegory that Maimonides helped to initiate could scarcely be ignored by later commentators. Eventually it passed into all the realms of Jewish scriptural exegesis, including those of Kabbalah. Thus, only a generation after 'mythical' aspects of Kabbalah acquire increased importance in the thought of the sixteenth-century master of Safed, Isaac Luria, allegorical impulses increasingly appear in some early seventeenth-century Kabbalistic interpretations of Lurianic Kabbalah itself.⁵⁹ But a discussion of such later developments lies beyond the scope of this essay.

It remains possible to consider 'symbolism' preponderant in some important forms of Kabbalah and to consider 'allegory' preponderant in a few other forms of Kabbalah, less central but still influential in its development. [On problems regarding the distinction between 'symbol' and 'allegory' in Kabbalah and later interpretation, see chapters 12 (i, vi) and 18–20. —ed.] It would not be historically accurate, however, to attribute allegorical exegesis solely to Jewish philosophers or to consider it either absent or rejected in Kabbalistic literature as a whole. Instead of a strict distinction between Kabbalah and philosophy or between 'symbolic' and 'allegorical' forms of discourse, I propose a different orientation that would treat Kabbalah as much richer, more open, and more capable of incorporating different forms of interpretation.

⁵⁹ See Nissim Yosha, *Myth and Metaphor: Abraham Cohen Herrera's Philosophical Interpretation of Lurianic Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1994) [Hebrew].

BOCCACCIO: THE MYTHOGRAPHER OF THE CITY

Giuseppe F. Mazzotta

Boccaccio was fascinated by classical myth more than either Dante or Petrarch ever was. Most of his texts, from the *Filostrato* to the *Teseida*, from the *Amorosa Visione* to the *Ninfale Fiesolano*, to mention only the most conspicuous examples, bring to life and redramatize the complexities of Greek myth, in which the matter of Troy figures prominently. In some cases, such as *La Caccia di Diana*, classical myth is the fictitious veil for the representation of aristocratic society in fourteenth-century Naples. A sure sign (and a sure consequence) of Boccaccio's mythopoeic consciousness is the genealogical systematization of mythical traditions he compiles in his encyclopedic *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium Libri*.¹ This encyclopedia of myth, which ranges from its phenomenology in rituals to its function in the representation of the gods, from its structure of temporal displacement and succession to the radical implications myth has for poetry, history, and the moral values of Boccaccio's own time, puts Boccaccio on a path of indisputable intellectual autonomy from Dante and, to some extent, even from Petrarch. [On earlier approaches to mythology, see chapters 2 (i, vii), 3, and 10. On Boccaccio's encyclopedic program and the imaginative construct of his 'genealogical' design, see chapter 12 (ii). —ed.]

Dante seeks to give his imaginative and conceptual frameworks a single focus wherein poetic myth, philosophy, and theology cohere in an intelligible unity.² The case of Petrarch, on the other hand, is more problematical. His desire to promote the rebirth of classical antiquity was for him a systematic undertaking and a total personal enterprise, which has long been acknowledged, to use Pierre de

¹ Citations of the *Genealogiae* in this essay refer to Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium Libri*, ed. Vincenzo Romano, 2 vols. (Bari, 1951).

² The problem in Dante has been examined by Jean Pépin, *Dante et la tradition de l'allégorie* (Montreal, 1970).

Nolhac's term, as his '*humanisme*.' His classical project retrieves the tradition of Italian humanism, which includes the likes of Albertino Mussato, Lovato dei Lovati, and Giovanni del Virgilio.³ The myth of Daphne and Apollo, on the other hand, is the underlying narrative structure of the *Canzoniere*, and it defines what might be called the arabesque of his imagination, which quests for a theological resolution and, at the same time, resists any absolute identification with theology.

From this perspective, the imagination of the poet occupies a *liminal* position vis-à-vis theology. This liminality is not to be taken as a denial of a dramatic and religious counterforce in Petrarch's fundamentally humanistic impulse. In reality, Petrarch's religious convictions and ideology can hardly be challenged. It should be recalled in this regard that during his protracted stay in Avignon Petrarch counts within his circle of friends a mythographer such as Pierre Bersuire. Bersuire, who is the bishop of Avignon, composes in the second quarter of the fourteenth century an immensely popular *Ovidius moralizatus*. This moralized Ovidian hermeneutics is transparently a theologization of the myths from the *Metamorphoses*, and this theologization is carried out as if the myths' literal burden were allegorical adumbrations of Christian doctrine.⁴ In spite of the extraordinary importance he assigns to the allegorical tradition of mythography, only rarely does Petrarch find a harmonious balance between the two antithetical strains— theological and poetic— of his imagination.⁵

³ The various aspects of Petrarch's humanism (his debt to Latin literature, his Roman political ideas, his Stoic ethics, etc.) have been studied by, among others, Pierre de Nolhac, *Petrarque et l'humanisme*, rev. ed. (1907; rpt. Paris, 1965); cf. A. Tripet, *Petrarque ou la connaissance de soi* (Geneva, 1967); Giuseppe Billanovich, *Petrarca letterato: I. Lo scrittoio di Petrarca* (Rome, 1947); E. Garin, *L'umanesimo italiano* (Bari, 1964), pp. 29–35; Garin, 'Francesco Petrarca e le origini del Rinascimento,' in *Convegno internazionale Francesco Petrarca*, ed. E. Cerulli et al., Atti dei Convegni Lincei, 10 (Rome, 1976), pp. 11–21; Jennifer Petrie, *Petrarch: The Augustan Poets, the Italian Tradition and the Canzoniere* (Dublin, 1983). Cf. also Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch* (Durham, N.C., 1993).

⁴ Bersuire's exposition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is in book 15, chapters 2–15, of his *Reductorium Morale*; chapter 2 has been edited by Maria S. van der Bijl, 'Petrus Berchorius, *Reductorium morale* liber xv: *Ovidius moralizatus cap. ii*,' *Vivarium*, 9 (1971), 25–48. For further information see R.E. Kaske, with Arthur Groos and Michael W. Twomey, *Medieval Christian Literary Imagery: A Guide to Interpretation*, Toronto Medieval Bibliographies, 11 (Toronto, 1988).

⁵ Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Petrarch's Genius: Penitence and Prophecy* (Berkeley, 1991), argues for what could be called a 'Dantesque' reading of Petrarch whereby classical myth is subordinated to the truth of Christian revelation. To balance Boyle's singlemindedness cf. Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in*

By contrast, Giovanni Boccaccio's relationship to myth is marked by the conviction of its overarching inevitability and necessity. The language of myth is necessary for a variety of reasons. In a letter Petrarch writes to his brother Gherardo (*Familiars* X), he discusses the links binding together theology and poetry, and he claims that 'theology is the poetry of God.' Boccaccio would certainly agree with Petrarch's claim, implicit in his equation of theology and poetry, that the world has a poetic foundation. His biography of Dante (known as *Trattatello in laude di Dante*) theorizes, in the very wake of Petrarch's formulations, the common features shared by Scripture and poetry. Yet Boccaccio's mythography, as shall be shown, radically departs from the views held by his predecessors of the Italian Trecento. Myths are necessary for him because they express poetically the hazy, uncertain beginnings of culture. It can be said that myths are understood by Boccaccio in terms that directly foreshadow Giambattista Vico's philosophical thought in the *Scienza nuova*.⁶ In Vico's reading myths are narratives of history and poetic constructions of civil life. [On Vico's treatment of mythology, see chapters 12 (v) and 17. —ed.]

Boccaccio's myths, more precisely, are parables of historical and political events. Myths have an imaginative power, however, that far exceeds the boundaries of political discourse, and they appeal to Boccaccio because they enable him to advance a theory of literature whereby literature is the privileged language of the mind's shared phantasms and cultural memories. To be sure, the imaginative link between literature and politics had been forged and imparted by the rhetorical tradition that reaches Boccaccio from Cicero's *De inventione* through Brunetto Latini's commentary in his *La rettorica* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. But there is another source for Boccaccio's reflection on myth. The abstract question of the relationship between fiction and history as well as the idea of myth as a philosophical speculation into the structure of the cosmos and the shape of human life within it come to Boccaccio from the theorists of the twelfth century in what is frequently called the 'school of Chartres.'

Already decades ago, medieval historians such as E. Jeaneau and M.-D. Chenu were trailblazers in defining the context of the intellectual debates on myth and symbolism in the twelfth century.⁷ We

Renaissance Poetry (New Haven, 1982); cf. also John Freccero, 'The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics,' *Diacritics*, 5 (1975), 34–40.

⁶ A recent reassessment of Vico's notion of myth is by Joseph Mali, *The Rehabilitation of Myth: Vico's 'New Science'* (Cambridge, 1992).

⁷ M.-D. Chenu, 'Involucrum: le mythe selon les théologiens médiévaux,' *Archives*

have finally come to see the extent to which the theology of the twelfth century, thanks to the Victorines, such as Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, is consciously constructed as a symbolic form. A text such as Hugh's *Didascalicon* elaborates a theory of reading which is a total reorganization of the arts and sciences, the so-called *trivium* and *quadrivium*, in order to arrive at the citadel of theology and the understanding of the Bible. From their own perspectives, William of Conches, Bernard Silvester, and Arnulf of Orleans went on to link myth and literature with philosophy in the belief that fictions and fables (*narratio fabulosa*) are vehicles for philosophical and ethical truths. The allegorical interpretation of the *Aeneid* by Servius as well as the mythography of Fulgentius are the sources for Bernard's polysemous reading of the *Aeneid* as an allegory of the various phases of human life from infancy to maturity.⁸ [On human and cosmic order in the twelfth-century interpretation of ancient texts, see chapters 2 (vii) and 10. —ed.]

The philosophical-poetic framework within which such allegorical readings are developed does not give an adequate idea of how textual specificities are coerced within a scheme of intelligibility. Discussing veiled discourse (*integumenta*) in his allegorical commentary on the first book of the *Aeneid*, Bernard indicates that the names of the gods are variously subject to *equivocationes* (alternative meanings) and to *multivocationes* (plurality of names). On the one hand, 'the same name designates different things'; for instance, 'Apollo sometimes designates the sun, sometimes divine wisdom, sometimes human wisdom. Jupiter sometimes designates fire, sometimes the supreme God. As we said above, Venus sometimes designates carnal desire, sometimes the harmony of the universe.' On the other hand, different names 'designate the same thing, and this is "plurality of names" (*multivocatio*). For instance, both Jupiter and Anchises designate the Creator.'⁹

d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge, 22 (1955), 75–79; É. Jeuneau, 'L'usage de la notion d'*integumentum* à travers les gloses de Guillaume de Conches,' *AHDLM*, 24 (1957), 35–100. Cf. also Brian Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century: A Study of Bernard Silvester* (Princeton, 1972); Winthrop Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century* (Princeton, 1972.)

⁸ For an extended view of these questions see J.W. Jones, Jr., 'Allegorical Interpretation in Servius,' *The Classical Journal*, 56 (1961), 218–22; L.G. Whitbread, *Fulgentius the Mythographer* (Columbus, Ohio, 1971); J.R. O'Donnell, 'The Sources and Meaning of Bernard Silvester's Commentary on the *Aeneid*,' *Mediaeval Studies*, 24 (1962), 234–37. My discussion refers to Bernard as the author of the twelfth-century *Aeneid* commentary cited below, although it should be noted that the author's identity is not entirely certain.

⁹ The quotation is taken from *The Commentary on the First Six Books of the Aeneid of*

Such a lucid consciousness of the inner tension between generalized abstract meanings and formal, rhetorical properties of language leads Bernard to a defense of the epistemological and utilitarian values of fiction. He argues that the study of fables and their style has a dual aim. The verbal ornaments are rhetorically profitable, and by studying them one can attain the highest skill in writing. But one can also derive the benefit of self-knowledge from the moral content of the text. Bernard's views had a great impact on his disciple Alan of Lille, and they are crucial for grasping Boccaccio's epochal treatment of myth.

Boccaccio worked on his *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods* for much of his life, and he finished it in 1373. In order to grasp the conceptual thrust of this text and the novelty of his vision one should recall the context of his immediate intellectual concerns. It is important to remember in this respect that while finishing the *Genealogy* Boccaccio was giving public lectures on the *Divine Comedy* in Florence. The public readings of Dante go as far as canto XVII of *Inferno* and are interrupted by Boccaccio's death in 1375. But even in their partial, fragmentary structure, these lectures cast the *Divine Comedy* as the founding text of a new culture, and, in this sense, they markedly differ from other critical readings of Dante produced from 1330 on. At stake is Boccaccio's sense of the role of poetry as the founding myth of a cultural order, and that sense needs at least briefly to be defined.

It is well-known that the *Divine Comedy* was subjected to interpretive readings right from the start. One should mention Dante's own self-exegesis, the *Letter to Cangrande*, which glosses the first twelve lines of *Paradiso* and claims that the *Divine Comedy* was written according to the principles of theological allegory. It states, furthermore, that the figure organizing the narrative is the biblical Exodus and that the poem should be read according to the four senses of biblical exegesis (literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical.) Dante's self-exegesis, however, is not limited to the parameters of the theological tradition. As a matter of fact, the *Letter to Cangrande* also brings out the poem's metaphorical structure, as if to dramatize the problematical relationship holding together theology and poetry.¹⁰

Vergil Commonly Attributed to Bernardus Silvestris, ed. J.W. Jones and E.F. Jones (Lincoln, Nebr., 1977), pp. 9–10.

¹⁰ I have treated this matter of the tension between allegory of poets and allegory of theologians in my *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy* (Princeton, 1979); see esp. ch. 6, pp. 227–74.

The tension between theology and poetry was resolved by one of the earliest commentaries on the *Divine Comedy*, the commentary by Guido da Pisa. This Carmelite friar casts Dante's poem as a visionary text and Dante as a prophet in the line of Daniel. Dante is for our time the hand that appears opposite Daniel and writes '*Mane, Thechel, Phares*.'¹¹ Guido's acknowledgement of Dante's poetic visionariness was not unanimous. The Dominican chapter of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, for instance, prohibited the reading of the *Divine Comedy* on the grounds that it was heretical. And we know that Dante's son, Pietro, to protect his father's and possibly his own reputation, wrote of his father as a theological poet.

By contrast, Boccaccio in his commentary on the *Divine Comedy* views Dante as a poet in the classical tradition. Dante, so we are told, has surpassed Vergil. But the uniqueness of Boccaccio's view of Dante's poetry emerges from his *Life of Dante*, in which he directly grapples with the question of the identity and difference between poetry and theology. 'Theology and Poesy,' so writes Boccaccio, 'agree in the way in which they go to work. But in their subject matter I affirm that they are not only quite diverse, but also in some sort adverse; because the subject of sacred Theology is the divine truth, that of ancient Poetry the gods of the Gentiles and men.'¹² Nonetheless, the question of poetry is no longer one that seeks to determine, as Petrarch and the Chartrians before him had done, whether or not poetry can be a vehicle for theological or philosophical truths. 'I say,' Boccaccio continues, 'that Theology and Poesy may be considered to be almost one and the same thing I say further that Theology is naught else than a certain Poesy of God.' [On intersections between 'theology' and 'poetry' in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, see chapters 2 (vii–viii), 10, and 12 (ii). —ed.] This statement is the ground in which Boccaccio's radical claims about poetry are rooted: poets are empowered to impose names on the Divinity, and, by their act of naming, they are the founders of the world and the moulders of our common perceptions. This principle remains central in Boccaccio's commentary on the *Divine Comedy*,

¹¹ I am quoting from Guido da Pisa's 'Prologue' to his commentary on the *Divine Comedy*. The text is available in *Critical Essays on Dante*, ed. G. Mazzotta (Boston, 1991), p. 14.

¹² The passage is quoted from Boccaccio's *Life of Dante* in *Critical Essays on Dante*, p. 25.

which is articulated according to the principles of poetic allegory, wherein a 'literal' interpretation of each canto (historical details, documentary glosses, long exposition of myths) is followed by an 'allegorical' reading.

Boccaccio's understanding of allegory departs from the hermeneutics Dante advances in his *Letter to Cangrande* (which Boccaccio did not know) and in the *Convivio* (II, i, 2–3), which he knew. More extensively than in the *Letter to Cangrande* Dante distinguishes in the *Convivio* between an 'allegory of theologians,' which is imitative of the Bible and is marked by a quadruple level of signification, and an 'allegory of poets.' The core distinction between the two modalities hinges on the value with which the literal sense is invested. In the allegory of poets the literal sense is always a fiction, and Dante illustrates this mode by recalling the myth of Orpheus. Orpheus moves stones by the power of his song: the fable's allegorical significance is the power of poetry to move man to action. On the other hand, in the allegory of theologians the literal level is *historical*: it is a historical fact, Dante says, that the Red Sea opened up when the Jews left Egypt and journeyed to the Promised Land.¹³

Boccaccio's commentary on *Inferno* recognizes exclusively the modality of poetic allegory, for poetry at large holds within its compass all theology, philosophy, and myths. In the *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods*, the distinction between fiction and history fades. In fact, the key word of the title, *Genealogy*, forfeits any notion of historical objectivity in the reconstruction of the past. Boccaccio enters the domain of the imagination where no such objective order is possible, and yet he brings the texture of history into the order of the imagination. More importantly, the term *genealogy* implies that the text purports to be a meta-discourse or posthumous commentary on myth. As such, it describes for Boccaccio the total history of man's creative imagination from the beginning to the present, and the lineage or dynasty of myths is treated as if those myths displayed a system of kinship derived from a common origin.

The *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods* includes fifteen books, of which the first thirteen trace the families of various gods and goddesses; each of these thirteen books is preceded by a genealogical tree. The metaphor of the genealogical tree implies, among other things, that

¹³ I have treated this issue in my *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, cited above in n. 10. Cf. also my *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton, 1993).

myths are subjected to time: they come into being, they grow, and finally they die only to reappear under different guises. The limited life-span of the myths suggests that Boccaccio writes his compilation from the standpoint of what could be called a post-mythic consciousness, in the sense that the myths are for him posthumous memories or cultural reveries. He culls his account from a variety of eclectic sources and wills to bring them back to life. [On the later, Romantic attempt to develop a 'new mythology' as an effort to preserve cultural memory, see chapter 18. —ed.]

The chief purpose of Boccaccio's encyclopedic compilation of myth emerges in the last two books of the *Genealogy*. These concluding books are a passionate defense of poetry and of poetry's usefulness. As he approaches the very end of his work Boccaccio summarizes his aims as follows:

Lo, at length, merciful King, I have, by the goodness of God, reached the end of my task. I have employed such skill as I have in recounting the traditionary genealogy of the Gentile gods and their posterity; these I have ascertained with wide research and set down in order. In obedience to your command, I have according to my ability added interpretations to the myths, both derived from the ancients and from my own slender intellect. I have also performed what I considered in some directions a most urgent duty, and shown that the poets, contrary to the notion of my opponents, are, I will not say all just men, but at least not absurd nor mere story-tellers—nay, they are marked with secular learning, genius, character, and high distinction.

I have also fastened my little craft to the shore with anchors and cables of my own invention, yet ever trusting more in God's favor than in the strength of my own contrivances. . . . (XV, xiv)¹⁴

The passage conveys with clarity the inner movement and coherence of the *Genealogy*: it traces a movement from the past to the present, from myth to literature. The writer is a researcher and an interpreter who has arrived at the shores of the present time. Indeed, the history of the present, which is Boccaccio's true interest, is signaled by the fact that the last two books of the encyclopedia are devoted to the discussion of allegory and poetry, which for Boccaccio are the actual offspring or imaginative displacement of ancient myth. Because poetry derives from myth, it undergoes transformations in time, but poetry does not destroy the mythical framework from which

¹⁴ Unless otherwise noted, translations from this work are taken from *Boccaccio on Poetry*, trans. Charles G. Osgood, sec. ed. (Indianapolis, 1956); see pp. 140–41.

it originates. Much as myth, literary fictions are generalized expressions of concrete actuality, and in their plurality they make visible the plural, temporal transfigurations of experience. Thus, the wisdom of ancient myth is the wisdom of poetry itself, and the poet takes over in the present the functions that in the past were attributed to the theologian.

Yet the claim that the value of poetry is coextensive with the value of myth is countered by the awareness that the myths of antiquity are not wholly retrievable and intelligible from a modern perspective. Boccaccio makes this argument at the very inception of the *Genealogy*. In the 'Preface,' which introduces the narrative and which is addressed to Hugo IV, the Lusignan king of Cyprus and Jerusalem from 1324 to 1358, Boccaccio obliquely wonders about his own authority. No direct link is established between the legitimacy and authority of the king and the mythographer's own doubts about his historical enterprise. At the center of Boccaccio's reflection stands his perplexity about a positivist scholarship, and the perplexity comes forth as the acknowledgement of a temporal distance between himself and the archeology of myth he has diligently pursued. He will not be able, he ruefully admits to the king, to produce a perfect work out of the distorted and warped elements of tradition:

Who can bring to light and life again minds long since removed in death? Who can elicit their meaning? A divine task that—not human! The Ancients departed in the way of all flesh, leaving behind them their literature and their famous names for posterity to interpret according to their own judgment. But as many minds, so many opinions. What wonder? There are the words of Holy Writ, clear, definite, charged with unalterable truth, though often thinly veiled in figurative language. Yet they are frequently distorted into as many meanings as there are readers. (Preface, p. 11)

The sense of the past, crystallized in its myths, is no longer immediately available because the tooth of time has eaten away books and has reduced much of ancient 'Greek and Latin literature to dust' (p. 8). The Alexandrian library has vanished; the cultural and linguistic unity of the Roman Empire has been divided between, on the one side, the Latin and Greek components and, on the other side, the inaccessible barbarian part.

Boccaccio's elegiac motif about time's sovereignty over human achievements expands into a reflection both on the divisive nature of all interpretation and on the political disintegration of Latinity. The political-cultural argument, reminiscent of Petrarch's complex

project concerning the politics of culture, is muted but not absent in the text.¹⁵ By contrast, Boccaccio directly confronts the issue of conflicts in interpretation. As happens with biblical exegesis, which steadily experiences and seeks to overcome interpretive differences, there is a crisis of authority in determining the exact sense of the fables of antiquity. [On temporal change and the problem of interpretive authority, see chapters 1 (i), 12 (ii, v–viii), and 17–20. —ed.]

The reason for this interpretive crisis lies for Boccaccio in the indefinite nature of the literal sense. Allegorical interpretations actually stem from the confusion of the letter and seek to clarify and resolve it. In a way, as Boccaccio laments the absence of a single, transcendent authoritative principle of interpretation for both Scripture and fictions, he in effect justifies his own role as a mythographer. The 'Preface' to the *Genealogy* presents the author as countering the powers of nature, time, and death: he sets down his own opinion after scouring the neglected places of antiquity in order to collect its fragments and bring them back to life, like 'Aesculapius restoring Hippolytus' (p. 13). The mythographer, like the legendary physician, confronts a dead past, indeed the death of the gods, and imaginatively revives them.

The references to mythology's revival and the crisis of authority that punctuate the 'Preface' are not isolated occurrences. They are motifs of the text that reemerge discreetly in the body of the *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods*, which by and large tells bloody stories of the struggle for sovereignty, such as the fight between Jove and the rebellious Titans. If there is a thematic concern in the text that is likely to unify the psychological, moral, political, and theological dimensions of the myths, such a concern would have to involve the antithesis between a generalized notion of order and the confusion brought about by rebellious forces. The myth of the struggle between the Titans and Jove is the emblem of such an overarching theme in the *Genealogy*.

Boccaccio's narrative starts with the figure of Demogorgon ('etymologically,' the grim demon). He is the terrifying primeval creator of the underworld, the root of the tree from which emanate its sons and daughters, among whom are Discord, Pan, Cloto, Lachesis, Atropos, Pollux, Phytos, Earth, and Erebus. Erebus, who in Greek mythology is the son of Chaos and brother of the Night, is the dark

¹⁵ I have discussed this issue in *The Worlds of Petrarch*, cited above in n. 3.

place under the Earth through which the dead wander on their way to Hades. Right from the start, then, Boccaccio's scholarly compilation aims to startle us with his account of the boundless and formless world of the night. No doubt this is the genealogy of the imagination as primordial chaos, which does not come from something else, and from which the myths come into being.

But this myth of origins also plunges us into the figuration of the monstrous depths of the natural world where the vicissitudes of the seasons, the life-cycles, and the strife of the cosmos itself are played out. Plainly, the emphasis on the chthonic deities announces Boccaccio's paramount interpretive principle, which is called euhemerism. Euhemerism designates the theory of allegorical interpretation whereby myths are considered to be narrative accounts of real events and people. In short, within the perspective of euhemerism, the congeries of pagan myths is not the reflection of a divine order. It is the metaphorization of historical facts. Myths are wholly human and poetic fictions expressing the terrifying forces of physical nature, and they are to be understood as nuggets of moral philosophy and wisdom.

The myth of the Giants, for instance, which occupies book IV of the *Genealogy*, is given a rationalistic or scientific explanation. In the wake of Lactantius's *On Divine Institutes* and the writing of Macrobius and Vergil, Boccaccio reconstructs the mythic origins of the giants. His first move is to identify the fourteen giants as children of Gaia or earth. He then relates their offspring—e.g., the sun, the Hours, Pasiphae, Circe, the moon. But Boccaccio's approach to the giants includes other perspectives. On the basis of the Bible, which records the giants Nimrod and Goliath, Boccaccio opines that giants are not merely metaphorical projections of human fears. A definite proof for his conviction in the historical reality of giants is the discovery of a 'giant's' body at Trapani. Such an elaborate rationale for the literalness of giants does not keep Boccaccio from probing their moral significance. In the wake of Macrobius, he makes the giants symbols of impious men whose minds are obsessively fixed, like the children of Saturn, on earthly values and pursuits.

The cosmogonic, historical, and moral significance myth has for Boccaccio recalls Bernard Silvester's *equivocationes*, the notion, that is, that myths are irreducible to one single allegorical signification. Their power lies, on the contrary, in the inexhaustible, plural senses they constantly emit. To be sure, Boccaccio articulates the fourfold system of allegorical interpretation—the literal, moral, tropological, and

anagogical senses—in book I (chapter 3) of the *Genealogy*. The four-fold mode, which the patristic tradition recognizes as constitutive of the representations of the Bible (and which the *Letter to Cangrande* applies to the *Divine Comedy*), is deployed by Boccaccio for a fable. By this procedure Boccaccio partially elides the difference between the historical and the fabulous: thus, the poetic myth of Perseus, who killed the Gorgon and flew away victorious in the air, is read as if it were a biblical story.¹⁶ ‘Now,’ Boccaccio writes, ‘this [i.e., the story of Perseus] may be understood in its literal or historical sense. If a moral sense is sought, it shows the victory of a wise man over vice and his attainment of virtue. Allegorically, it designates the lifting of the pious mind, which scorns worldly attractions, to heavenly things. In its further anagogical sense it figures Christ’s ascension to the Father after defeating the prince of the world.’¹⁷

As the gloss on Perseus makes clear, Boccaccio generally focuses on the moral sense of the fable, but he also brings to bear on it, as Bersuire does, the theological significance of the story. The mythological record, in short, is a totalizing palimpsest of the vast compass of human knowledge.¹⁸ One could look at his treatment of the myth of Prometheus to grasp Boccaccio’s hermeneutical-encyclopedic impulse. Prometheus is said to have studied with the Chaldeans and later to have withdrawn from the world in order to meditate on the secret constitution of the natural world. In historical terms, Prometheus is seen as a teacher; from a mystical viewpoint, he stands for the perfection of God or of Nature. It was only after the Fall that the legendary Prometheus, the hero who steals fire from the gods and thereby opens the way to civilization, came into being. This totalizing thrust in the explanation of classical myths reappears in Boccaccio’s defense of poetry at the end of the *Genealogy*. Poetry, we are told, is an encyclopedic form in that it is made up of all the liberal arts and theology; it is a vast structure capable of containing within its folds and expressing the totality of creation.

I have so far tried to clarify the shape and methods of Boccaccio’s mythographic procedure, and I have suggested that the novelty of

¹⁶ For the patristic exegesis of the Bible see Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l’Écriture*, 2 pts. in 4 vols. (Paris, 1959–64).

¹⁷ *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium Libri* (I, 3), p. 19. The translation is mine.

¹⁸ An excellent thematic summary of the general contents of the *Genealogy* and its place in Boccaccio’s canon is by Thomas G. Bergin, *Boccaccio* (New York, 1981), esp. pp. 230–45.

Boccaccio's interpretation of myth lies in his sense of the primacy of literature. But in order to define the new content of his enterprise—the way in which the *Genealogy* alters the mythographic traditions—it is necessary to place this text against the existing archives of myth from which Boccaccio lavishly draws. His sources, as is known, range from Macrobius to Fulgentius, from Cicero to Isidore's *Etymologies*, from Varro to Servius, from Arnulf of Orleans to St. Augustine and Pliny. But more broadly, there are two central traditions which Boccaccio collates. One is the biblical representation of genealogies. The other, and the more important for him, is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

The Bible is, without a doubt, the fundamental model of Boccaccio's genealogical thinking. The mythical generations he evokes in the various chapter headings clearly allude to the genealogical narrations of both Testaments. Book VI of the *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods*, for instance, relates how from the root of Dardanus (chapter 1) came Erichonius, who, in turn, generated Troy (chapter 2), and how from him came Ganymede and then Ilion, down to Aeneas, who begat Iulius, from whom came eventually Numitor and Romulus and Remus (chapter 73). The metaphor of the tree—with Dardanus its root or 'radix'—is certainly an echo of the metaphor of the tree of Jesse that is based on Isaiah (11:1) and that is transformed into the opening of the Gospel of Matthew. The genealogical format is also a transparent reflection of the kind of narrative that is presented, for example, in Genesis 5:1 as 'the book of the generation of Adam.'

The metaphor of the tree renders, in addition, the organic and historical quality of the continuity of the myth. As in a tree the life of the branch depends on the properties of the roots and trunk, so in a family tree the nature of the progenitor is critical to the virtues of the descendants. In brief, the metaphor of the tree suggests a genetic, natural chain of identity, which guarantees the legitimacy and authenticity of the tradition in the historical process. At stake in such a metaphor is the myth of foundation or origins as a decisive political experience. The myth is decisive in that it states that the essence or meaning of things lies in their origin. In effect, the naturalism of the metaphor undermines the possibility of history, for it announces that the meaning of historical events or characters is predetermined at the very beginning.

Such a genetic structure of signification is somewhat at odds, however, with Boccaccio's narrative procedures and purposes. As shown

earlier in the discussion of the text's dedication to King Hugo IV, Boccaccio's mythographic narrative starts as a self-consciously belated or posthumous epistemological adventure, as a dangerous voyage over the high seas of fabulous origins, hazy and fragmentary evidence, and uncertain meanings. Boccaccio's own authority, in contrast to the legitimate and hereditary authority of the king, is not self-evident, and it can only be constituted by the work itself. Paradoxically, however, his interpretation of myths (as well as his understanding of the king's dynasty) valorizes the origin rather than the outcome.

Within a literary context, Boccaccio's procedure recalls the assumptions lying behind Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, wherein the meaning of a word is to be found in its *etymon* or origin. But more pointedly than Isidore, Boccaccio evokes a biblical genealogical model, while he claims for poetry a spiritual authority overlapping with that of the Bible. His defense of poetry, in fact, makes explicit that 'the pagan poets' were 'theologians' (*Genealogy* XV, 8) and that pagan fables and metaphors can be justified by analogy with their biblical counterparts. More fundamentally, the biblical model is also for Boccaccio the parable of how authority is constituted, how the present is invested with a special value because of its organic derivation from a divine past. From this standpoint, the metaphor of genealogy is a justification and an archeology of the present. This political understanding of the Bible is made even more apparent by the other rhetorical model Boccaccio deploys, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

It is well-known that much medieval mythography, such as that composed by Pierre Bersuire in Avignon under the shadow of Petrarch, is a moralized commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The same is true for Giovanni del Virgilio, who was a contemporary and correspondent of Dante around 1320 and who taught rhetoric at the University of Bologna. Whereas Giovanni del Virgilio gives a spiritual and moral interpretation of the fables of Ovid, Pierre Bersuire focuses on theological and ecclesiastical dimensions of meaning. I mention these two cases of Ovidian interpretation in order to make two points. My first point is that Boccaccio, unlike Giovanni del Virgilio and Bersuire, compiles a secular and humanistic mythography. Although in the fourteenth century this is unusual, one should quickly stress that the secularization of myth is, in and of itself, nothing new. Fulgentius had performed the same operation in the late fifth or early sixth century. Boccaccio's novelty, if anything, belongs to a different order, which leads me to my second point.

For Boccaccio, as well as for both Giovanni del Virgilio and Bersuire, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the obvious frame of reference. But there is a great distance between Boccaccio and his two near-contemporary mythographers. With a transparent literary self-consciousness Boccaccio writes fifteen books in his *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods*, in what I take to be an imitation of the fifteen books of Ovid's poem. And as much as the *Genealogy*, the *Metamorphoses* dramatizes the total process of history from the formation of the cosmos to the present. There is, however, a remarkable difference between the finalities of Ovid and those of Boccaccio.

Ovid's myth of origins ranges from the shapelessness of chaos in book I to the foundation of Rome and Rome's history in book XV. No doubt, Ovid's representation of the totality of history is an ironic counter to Vergil's *Aeneid*, which claims that the Roman Empire, originating in heaven with Venus, is a providential structure for universal history. Vergil writes a poem of national dynasty that the Renaissance (see, for instance, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*) was to imitate. More precisely, for Vergil Julius Caesar and the Emperor Augustus bring to focus the prefigurative pattern of history initiated by Aeneas and his son Iulus. By the same token, the end of book XV of the *Metamorphoses* recalls the deification of Caesar, how at his death Venus comes down to carry Caesar's soul aloft to heaven. For all these internal textual reminiscences, however, Ovid's representation does not completely share Vergil's exalted but by no means unambiguous view of Rome. There is no stability in Ovid's conception of history. History is for him a ceaseless sequence of metamorphoses, and Roman history cannot escape the yoke of time. Yet as Ovid departs from the mythical delusions of a possible political stability available in the *Aeneid*, he still believes that his own work will endure 'beyond time's hunger' and that his own name will be remembered wherever Rome rules.

Boccaccio ends his own *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods* not with a statement on the relationship between politics and literature. His focus, as has been shown, falls on poetry, its civilizing role, its usefulness and rigor, and its power to preserve the past. Nonetheless, his view of literature and myth enacts a theory of history that is more radical than Ovid's and more topical than that put forth by Giovanni del Virgilio and Bersuire. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* establishes a pattern of substantial Pythagorean unity underneath the constant flow of forms. For their part, Bersuire and Giovanni believe in the medieval

myth of spiritual and cultural continuity between past and present. By contrast, Boccaccio writes a history of myth as a fractured sequence, the meaning of which depends on the persuasive powers of the compiler's rhetoric. In sum, Boccaccio's *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods* is a humanistic theory of history whereby history, like the myths the text retrieves and glosses, is a work of imaginative reconstruction of the past, a reflection on origins so that a new beginning may be envisioned. The way to bring ancient myth and history to life is through the animating powers of poetry. [On historical discontinuity and problems of imaginative reconstruction in later periods, see chapters 12 (v–viii) and 17–20. —ed.]

To make the claim that for Boccaccio myth both tells the story of human consciousness and offers a way of reading history is not unusual. A text such as the *Ninfale Fiesolano* (*The Nymph Song of Fiesole*), written around 1340, tells a story that takes place in the 'golden age of prehistory,' to use the phrase of Thomas Bergin, an age of perfect origins. It is the story of a young shepherd, Africo, who falls in love with a young virgin and a devotee of chaste Diana, Mensola. All epics tell stories of the foundation and destruction of cities—witness the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*, which is obsessively punctuated with accounts of falling cities and rising new cities (Carthage, Pergamus, etc.) The epic motif sustaining the *Ninfale Fiesolano* is the foundation of the city of Fiesole and its ties with Florence. What Boccaccio the poet had dramatized early in his life reappears later in the *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods* as a problematical consciousness of the undeterminable origins of history outside of myth.

How does Boccaccio come to envision such a humanistic theory of history and such a historical view of myth? A possible answer is to be found in the history of the fourteenth century and in the fourteenth-century realities of Italy. For Boccaccio, and especially for Dante, Petrarch, and Catherine of Siena, this is the century of the so-called Babylonian Captivity of the Church, when Avignon becomes the see of the Popes and replaces Rome. The charges of illegitimacy in the apostolic succession are well-known; equally well-known are the efforts of Dante, Petrarch, and Catherine of Siena to bring the Church back to Rome. This feat is accomplished in 1374, a year before Boccaccio's death. Boccaccio's *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods*, completed in 1373, casts light on the shaky foundations of authority and traces the route of the imagination as the means of countering the broken history of the present.

RENAISSANCE HIEROGLYPHIC STUDIES: AN OVERVIEW

Charles Dempsey

The first Renaissance book on ancient hieroglyphs was written by Pierio Valeriano, whose *Hieroglyphica* appeared in 1556. Valeriano's personal medal shows his portrait on the obverse; on the reverse appears Mercury, the god who first taught the art of writing to mankind, standing proudly next to an obelisk inscribed with the sacred writing that Pierio had claimed to recover for human understanding.¹ However, the *Hieroglyphica* marks not so much the beginning of Renaissance hieroglyphic study as it does the end of its first phase.

In its early stages that study was stimulated above all by the recovery of Greek sources (among them a Greek text of the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollo, a kind of dictionary of 189 hieroglyphs originally composed probably in very late antiquity and brought by Cristoforo de' Buondelmonti from Andros to Florence in 1419) and their translation by humanists like Poggio Bracciolini, Marsilio Ficino, and George of Trebizond. The start of hieroglyphic study also coincides with the rise of non-Jewish humanist study of the languages of the Levant, especially Aramaic and Hebrew, motivated by a desire to bring to Christian exegesis the subtlety of rabbinical interpretive techniques. Hieroglyphs, moreover, as the very oldest form of writing, raised questions of special and perennial interest. In the very origins of language itself, before the catastrophe of Babel, what was the relation between concepts and the forms by which they were expressed, the relation between sign and signified, between words and things? What was the language of God himself? [On 'hieroglyphic' language from a Renaissance perspective, see chapter 12 (iii). On concepts of primal language in other interpretive movements, see chapters 3, 13, and 17. —ed.]

¹ Illustrated in J. Graham Pollard, *Medaglie italiane del Rinascimento nel Museo Nazionale del Bargello* (Florence, n.d.), III, 1415, no. 820.

When God raised two inscribed pillars outside Eden how were they inscribed? These were considered the prototypes for those immeasurably ancient obelisks upon which the Egyptians, thought to be the first inventors of religion, recorded, in the words of Ammianus Marcellinus, the actions, vows and decrees of gods and kings by engraving many kinds of beasts and birds. An example given by Herodotus is the inscription on an obelisk erected by the semi-legendary Sesostris (probably Rameses II) as a warning to his neighbors: the king conquers the brave with his armies, and the cowardly by his fame. Valeriano in his *Hieroglyphica* duly retranslated the Greek back into hieroglyphics. (See fig. 1, with the Latin subtitle: *Vicit armis strenuos, vicit fama inertes*.)

When Adam named the birds and animals, what was the relation between the beasts and the names he chose for them? It was thought that the signifier somehow embraced the thing signified in its wholeness, so that concept and object became one, and both could be immediately grasped in their totality. A hint of this appears in Diodorus Siculus's report that the Egyptian hieroglyph of the hawk also denotes swiftness, and that the concept embodied by the hawk can also be transferred, 'by appropriate metaphorical extension, to all swift things and to anything to which swiftness is appropriate.' This seemed confirmed by the fact that some ancient authors say that the hieroglyph of the open eye signifies God, and some say judgment, which is no contradiction insofar as the concept of God metaphorically incorporates judgment, one of the most conspicuous of God's attributes. Such hieroglyphs as these approximate the definition derived by Ficino from Plotinus. Both write that hieroglyphs express concepts analogously to the way God thinks, 'not by discursive reasoning and deliberation,' but instantaneously, grasping 'understanding, wisdom and substance in its whole, all at once.' This kind of hieroglyph I have named the Neoplatonic type. An example appears in Alberti's famous medal with the winged eye encircled by a laurel wreath (fig. 2), which is beautifully conceived precisely because it cannot be literally translated but only weakly paraphrased. Godlike, its essential meaning cannot be rendered discursively (and Alberti himself gave different but metaphorically consistent readings of the signs), even as its expression of divine intellect, judgment, swiftness and glory can all be immediately grasped, in a flash.

The open eye is one of the most familiar of all Renaissance hieroglyphs. It variously appears with the meaning of judgment, God, or

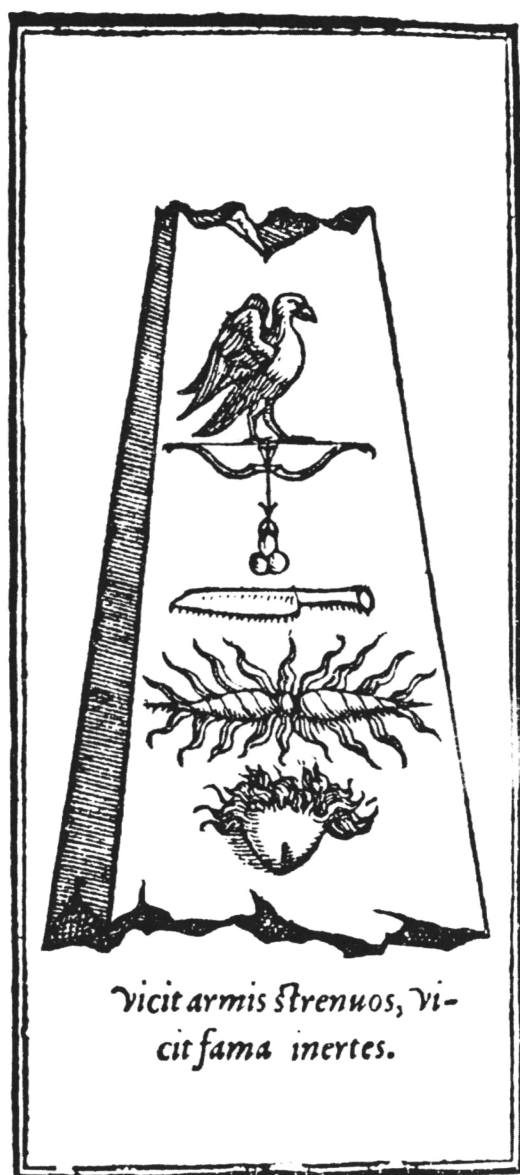


Figure 1



Figure 2

often as the adjectival *divus*, as in a dedication to the divinized Julius Caesar in Francesco Colonna's late-fifteenth-century romance, *Hypnerotomachia Polifili*. (See also the eye hieroglyph in the woodcut from the *Hypnerotomachia* illustrated in fig. 4.)² Clement of Alexandria says that the eye and sceptre, combining the concepts of God and sovereign providence, formed the hieroglyph for Osiris. So it appears on a hieroglyphic *elogium* composed by the Jesuit student of hieroglyphs Athanasius Kircher in honor of Ferdinand III, whom he named

² Illustrated in F. Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Polifili*, ed. and comm. G. Pozzi and L.A. Ciapponi (Padua, 1964), I, 238.

‘Osiris Austriacus.’³ Earlier the eye and sceptre had been used by Andrea Sacchi as the hieroglyph (we would say the attribute) for Divine Providence on his famous ceiling in Palazzo Barberini in Rome.⁴ Near her sits Eternity, identified by the famous attribute of the *ouroboros*, or tail-devouring snake, variously identified by Horapollon and other ancient authors as the hieroglyph for the year, time, or, as in this instance, eternity. [On the snake and hieroglyphic signification, see chapter 12 (iii). —ed.]

Another instance of the eye hieroglyph appears in a drawing by the architect Giovanni Antonio Dosio (fig. 3), which shows an obelisk randomly inscribed with various hieroglyphs. Their meaning might be said to be securely known on the basis of testimony given by the ancient authors, among whom we see to the left and right of the obelisk, like so many schoolmasters—books and pointers at the ready, eager to instruct us—Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Tacitus and Pliny. Not all the hieroglyphs derive from these authors, however. The tail-devouring snake (*draco*) again appears, identified by Dosio in his marginal notes as the year, which ends where it begins. He further records that the lion signifies time present because of its strength and force, the wolf time past (because of its devouring nature), and the dog time future because it is always sniffing out the path ahead, ever hopeful. These identifications derive from Macrobius’s and Horapollon’s reference to the three-headed beast that was another hieroglyphic attribute of Osiris. As Panofsky showed in a famous study, the combination of the three heads formed the hieroglyph for Prudence, and was so applied by Titian in a painting now in London showing portraits of a youth, a mature man and a greybeard (the old man is a self-portrait). The work is inscribed *Ex praeterito / praesens prudenter agit / ni futuru[m?] actionem deturpet* (‘From the experience of the past the present acts prudently lest it spoil future action’).⁵

Among other hieroglyphs on Dosio’s obelisk are the eel, identified as *l’invidioso* on the basis of Horapollon’s identifying the eel hieroglyph as envy or unfriendliness, *inimicitia*; the eye, signifying a just man (derived from judgment); and an open hand, denoting a *uomo liberale*,

³ Illustrated in Volkmann, cited below in the Bibliographical Note to this essay, p. 113, fig. 95.

⁴ Illustrated in A.S. Harris, *Andrea Sacchi: Complete Edition of the Paintings with a Critical Catalogue* (Princeton, 1977), plates 29–30.

⁵ See E. Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic* (New York, 1969), pp. 102 ff. and fig. 117.

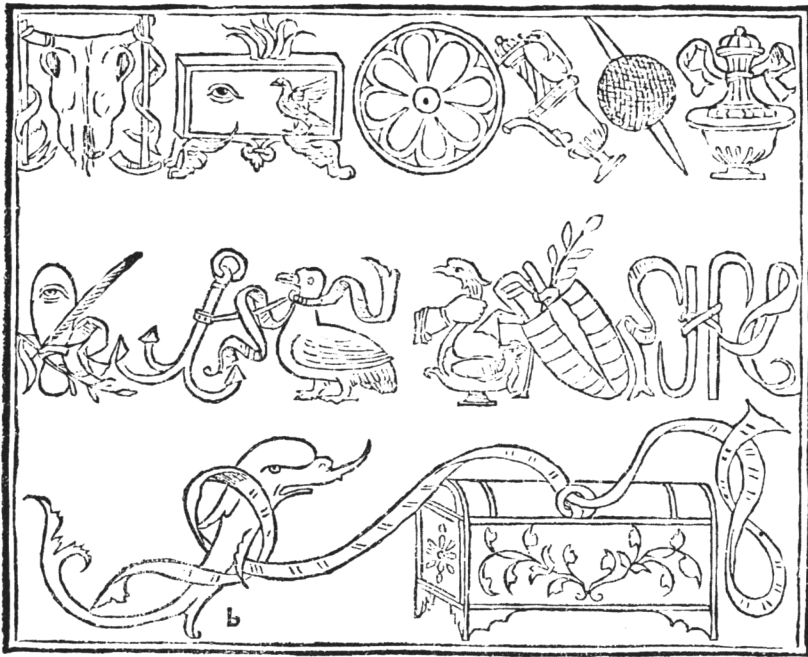


Figure 4

a liberal man. This last derives from Poggio Bracciolini's translation of Diodorus Siculus's report—in fact correct so far as true hieroglyphs are concerned—that the open hand means *liberalitas*. Such images reappear in the 1550 Lyons edition of the first Renaissance emblem book, the *Emblematum liber* (1531) of Andrea Alciato, whose conception of the book dates in part from the period in which he attended Filippo Fasanini's lectures on hieroglyphs in Bologna. [On forms of signification in emblem books, see chapters 12 (iv) and 16. —ed.] An emblem in the Lyons edition shows *liberalitas dei* by the hieroglyph of an open hand and an eye flying benignly over a peaceful landscape. The same meaning attaches to Lorenzo Lotto's hieroglyphic marquetry cover to the story of Cain and Abel (ca. 1530, in Bergamo). There God (indicated by the eye) extends the open hand of liberality towards the piety of Abel and gives the back of his hand to Cain's disobedience.⁶ Peter Paul Rubens, in his allegory

⁶ Illustrated in F. Cortesi Bosco, *Il coro intarsiato di Lotto e Capoferri per Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo* (Bergamo, 1987), fig. 194.

of 1625 showing the benefits of the reign of Marie de'Medici, indicated the queen's liberality (she is showering money onto the arts) by endowing her with a sceptre with an open hand.⁷ Mantegna in the *Triumph of Caesar* from the 1490s showed Caesar's liberality to his defeated enemies by placing an open hand on top of the model of a captured city.⁸ The same meaning appears in André Thevet's *Cosmographie du Levant* of 1575, which contains a woodcut of an obelisk in Alexandria (fig. 5—actually Cleopatra's Needle) then thought to be dedicated to Alexander the Great.⁹ The first three signs are the eye, the eel, and the open hand, thereby indicating the divine Alexander's liberality to his enemies. And the same image was adapted by the Dutch painter Joachim van Beuckelaer for several paintings of the *Ecce homo*, this time referring to the liberality of the divine Augustus towards his enemies, ironic of course because of the contrast of Augustus's vaingloriously asserted divinity and liberality to the treatment being accorded the divine Christ in the name of the emperor.¹⁰

The arrangement of the hieroglyphs in these last examples clearly differs from the Neoplatonic form used in Alberti's medal in that they are arranged in sequence and are translatable in a discursive order. This again finds ancient justification, for the fourth-century historian Ammianus Marcellinus writes that hieroglyphs stood not only for whole concepts but also for nouns and verbs, and Filippo Beroaldo in his commentary to Apuleius's *Golden Ass* added that the ribbons and tendrils winding about the hieroglyphs Apuleius describes in a book carried by a priest of Isis moreover functioned as adverbs and conjunctions. This kind of hieroglyphic expression I have named the discursive, or Venetian type, after its use by Colonna in the *Hypnerotomachia Polifili* (Venice, 1499), one of whose 'Egyptian' inscriptions indeed shows a dolphin connected by a ribbon to a box (fig. 4), the ribbon being translated by the author with the enclitic conjunction '-que.' [On 'discursive' forms of signification in late antique interpretation and Romantic theories of allegory, see chapters 3 and 18. —ed.]

⁷ Illustrated in R. Millen, *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures: A New Reading of Rubens' Life of Maria de'Medici* (Princeton, 1989), fig. 49.

⁸ Illustrated in *Andrea Mantegna* (exhibition catalogue), ed. J. Martineau (London and New York, 1992), pp. 371 f., no. 115.

⁹ See Dempsey, cited below in the Bibliographical Note to this essay.

¹⁰ Illustrated in Dempsey, p. 363.

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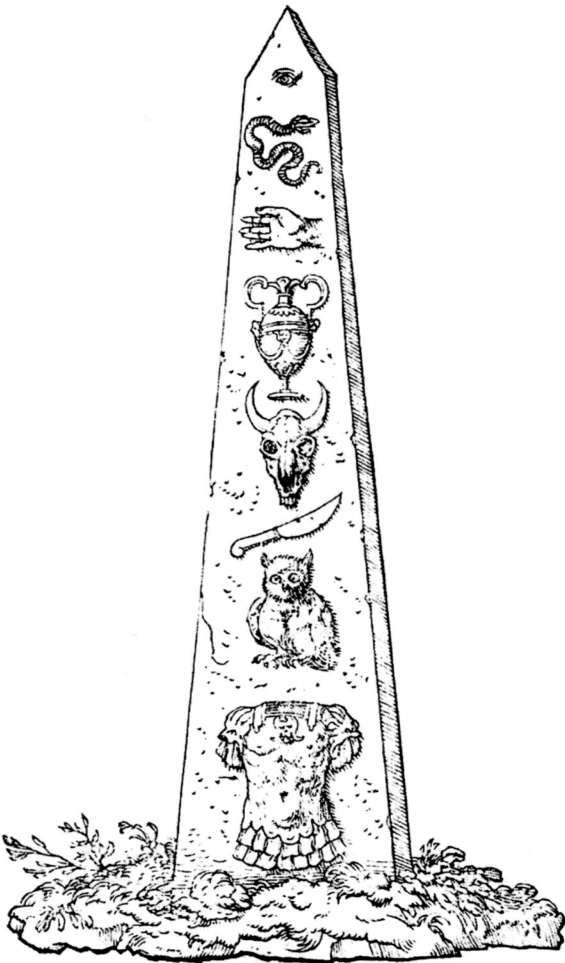


Figure 5

A third kind of hieroglyph we might name the paronomastic type, a punning rebus interesting chiefly because it shows an absorption of Clement of Alexandria's clear statement that hieroglyphs functioned not only in an emblematic way but also as phonemes. An amusing example is the hieroglyphic signature of an architect carved on a lintel in Viterbo, showing the monogram of S. Bernardino of Siena followed by an arch, a roof, a tower, and the word *faciebat*, thus revealing in Italian that one Bernardino, *arco, tetto, torre*, i.e. Bernardino the architect, made this. Such puns are not so rare as one might at first think. Another appears in Lorenzo Lotto's portrait of Lucina Brembate in Bergamo, in which *ci*, the Italian word for the letter 'c,' is inscribed in the crescent moon, thus giving the lady's name: *ci in luna*, or Lu-ci-na.¹¹

A famous example of an attempt to compose new sentiments in hieroglyphs is Dürer's portrait of the emperor Maximilian for the ambitious woodcut of 1514 for the emperor's Triumphal Arch (fig. 6). For the most part the hieroglyphs clustered round Maximilian derive from Horapollon's *Hieroglyphica*, for which Dürer and his shop had also prepared illustrations. Two examples are the hieroglyphs of a headless man or bodiless feet in water, denoting 'Impossible,' and a crane holding a stone in his upraised claw, signifying 'Vigilance,' both of which were also used for the inscription on Maximilian's portrait. One hieroglyph, however, is paronomastic, notably the cock—*gallus* in Latin—who stands for France, i.e., *Gallia*. The inscription was composed by the humanists Johannes Stabius and Willibald Pirckheimer, who have left German and Latin versions of it, which Panofsky has rendered in English:

¹¹ The Viterbo hieroglyph is mentioned by Vasari in his life of Bramante, though with the name of the architect mistaken, where he tells of Bramante's plan to make a similar paronomastic hieroglyph in the Vatican: 'The fancy took Bramante to make in a frieze on the outer façade of the Belvedere some letters after the manner of ancient hieroglyphics, showing the name of the pope and his own in order to show his ingenuity; and he began thus: "Julio II, Pont. Max.," having caused a head of Julius Caesar to be made, and a bridge with two arches, which signified "Julio II Pont.," adding an obelisk from the Circus Maximus for "Max." At which the pope laughed . . . saying that he had copied this folly from a door at Viterbo, on which one Maestro Francesco, an architect, put his name on the architrave by carving a St. Francis with an arch, a roof, and a tower, which interpreted in his way denoted "Maestro Francesco Architetto." See G. Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettori*, ed. and comm. G. Milanesi, 9 vols. (Florence, 1878–85), IV, 158, cited and discussed in E.H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London, 1972), pp. 102 ff. Lotto's portrait of Lucina Brembate is illustrated in G. Mascherpa, *Lorenzo Lotto a Bergamo* (Milan, 1971), fig. 19.

Maximilian, a prince of great piety and Roman emperor, magnanimous, powerful, courageous, ennobled by imperishable and eternal fame, descending from ancient lineage, endowed with all the gifts of nature and possessed of art and learning, master of a great part of the terrestrial globe, won a mighty victory over the king of France and thereby watchfully protected himself from the stratagems of this enemy, which was deemed impossible by all mankind.¹²



Figure 6

¹² See E. Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton, 1943), I, 177; I have made some adjustments in his wording.

An important feature of the portrait is that Dürer created it on the basis of Roman coins, which characteristically show the head of the emperor in profile surrounded by a Latin inscription, and on the reverse some allegorical image. Maximilian's eulogy is instead in hieroglyphs, which is to say that the allegorical images on imperial coin reverses, which in the Renaissance were thought to be a form of hieroglyph, here appear together with the emperor's portrait. An example of such a numismatic hieroglyph is the familiar Roman coin reverse of Fortune, with cornucopia in hand and with her rudder governing the world, which was exactly copied by Correggio in 1519 for the image of Fortune in the Camera di S. Paolo in Parma. For his part, Mantegna created a hieroglyph for Caesar's fortune in the *Triumph of Caesar* by combining the attributes alone, without the personification.¹³ Another example of such a numismatic hieroglyph appears in the speedy dolphin and stable anchor on the reverse of a coin of Titus, drawn by Grolier in the margin of his copy of Erasmus's *Adagia* at the entry for the proverb adopted by Augustus as his motto: *festina lente*, or 'make haste slowly.' The same hieroglyph had earlier appeared in the *Hypnerotomachia*; there the dolphin and anchor are preceded by a circle and translated by the author as '*Semper [Always] festina lente.*' The hieroglyph was immediately adopted as the press mark of the great book publisher Aldus Manutius. [On the emblematic adaptation of the image by Alciato, see chapter 12 (iv). —ed.] And the same motto was also expressed by the hieroglyph of the dolphin and remora, the sucker-fish that attaches itself to faster fish and whose name is still synonymous with 'hindrance.' This is used in Rubens's allegory of the Ship of State for Marie de'Medici, in which the queen's prudence is expressed by the dolphin and remora, denoting *festina lente*.¹⁴ Again, in his *Imprese eroiche* of 1554 Gabriello Symeoni thought to express the adage even more efficiently with the image of a slow crab catching a rapidly fluttering butterfly, together with the single word *Matura* (specifying ripeness), indicating in a flash the seizing of the moment.

From the expanding frame of references we have been tracing, it will already be clear that Renaissance 'hieroglyphic' study went far

¹³ For an illustration of Correggio's image see *Il Correggio e la camera di San Paolo*, ed. F. Barocelli (Milan, 1988), fig. 94; for Mantegna's see *Andrea Mantegna*, cited above in n. 8, pp. 371 f., no. 115.

¹⁴ Illustrated in Millen, cited above in n. 7, fig. 53.

beyond the study of actual Egyptian writing, embracing a far wider range of symbolic expression. Hieroglyphs were indeed understood as forming the foundation for a universal symbolic. [On Renaissance notions of a shared 'grammar' in sign systems at large, see chapters 12 (introduction and ii) and 14. —ed.] As Valeriano wrote in his *Hieroglyphica* (in an often repeated phrase), hieroglyphics encompassed every kind of symbolic or enigmatic utterance, whether expressed as pictograms, in images, in written allegories, in texts such as the *Aenigmata* of Pythagoras, or in the parables of Christ himself. From such a broad perspective, Augustus's motto *Festina lente* is itself a kind of hieroglyph (it is stated in the condensed form of a proverb), and the image of the dolphin and anchor is merely an alternative, visual hieroglyphic expression of the same thing, equally condensed. Hieroglyphic study is the study of condensed expression in the form of images. That study contributed to the passion for emblems, a far-reaching phenomenon of which Alciato's 1531 volume was only the initial stage, for *imprese* and devices, and for the attributes of allegorical personifications (like the wand carried by Sacchi's *Divina Sapienza*) as presented in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, first published in 1593. [On hieroglyphics and issues in the theory and practice of representation during and after the Renaissance, see chapter 12 (iii). —ed.] It was also a part of the Renaissance study and collection of compressed linguistic expression, appearing in some of the most popular books of the period. Such books included Poggio's *Facetiae* of 1435, a collection of Latin jokes, puns and witticisms that seeks to examine linguistic efficiency at its most condensed and elegant; Politian's *Detti piacevoli* of 1478, a collection of jokes and puns in the vernacular with the same serious purpose; Politian's *Miscellanea* of 1489, a hundred short essays on philological puzzles; not to mention the most widely read and enjoyed book of the Renaissance, Erasmus's *Adagia* of 1505, collecting and commenting upon the proverbs of the Greeks and Romans. All these, Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica* of 1556 included, are part of the overarching genre of the commonplace book, collecting and presenting to the reader, the poet, or the artist examples of variously categorized expressions of wit and wisdom. From these treasuries arose the shared literary, philological and cultural unity of the European literary and artistic tradition, spreading to all the lands of the continent.

I will end with a kind of hieroglyphic *summa*, appearing in the abbatial apartments of Giovanna da Piacenza in the Convent of San

Paolo in Parma, decorated between 1515 and 1520 by the little-known artist Alessandro Araldi together with the great Correggio, who left there one of his greatest masterpieces. In the room decorated by Araldi appear hieroglyphs, such as the detached feet that Horapollo had said indicated 'Impossibility,' as well as other enigmatic images.¹⁵ The rooms as a whole, however, are filled with enigmatic expressions of every conceivable kind, hieroglyphic utterances in their fullest extension. The most prominent among the many inscriptions appears over the fireplace of the room frescoed by Correggio. It reads: *Ignem gladio non fodias*—don't poke fire with a sword—one of the famous enigmas of Pythagoras that Valeriano called a hieroglyph.

¹⁵ Illustrated in G.Z. Zanichelli, *Iconologia della camera di Alessandro Araldi nel monastero di San Paolo in Parma* (Parma, 1979), fig. 32.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The literature on Renaissance hieroglyphic studies is vast, and I give here a highly selected summary of several of the most important and most easily available publications, beginning with what has rightly been called the masterpiece *hors concours* of them all: K. Giehlow, 'Die Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance, besonders der Ehrenpforte Kaisers Maximilian I. Ein Versuch,' *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* 32 (1915), 1–218. See further L. Volkmann, *Bilderschriften der Renaissance: Hieroglyphik und Emblematis in ihren Beziehungen und Fortwirkungen* (Leipzig, 1923); E. Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt and Its Hieroglyphics in European Tradition* (Copenhagen, 1961); M. Pope, *The Story of Archaeological Decipherment from Egyptian Hieroglyphs to Linear B* (New York, 1975); L. Dieckmann, *Hieroglyphics: The History of a Literary Symbol* (Saint Louis, 1970); and P. Castelli, *I Geroglifici e il mito dell'Egitto nel Rinascimento* (Florence, 1979). For more particular studies, see C. Dempsey, 'Renaissance Hieroglyphic Studies and Gentile Bellini's *Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria*,' in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*, ed. I. Merkel and A.G. Debus (Washington and London, 1988), pp. 342–365 (on the composition of discursive hieroglyphs); E.-M. Schenck, *Das Bilderrätsel* (Hildesheim, 1973) (for hieroglyphic rebuses); D.L. Drysdall, 'Filippo Fasanini and His "Explanation of Sacred Writing" (Text and Translation),' *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 13 (1983), 127–55; and R. Aulotte, 'D'Egypte en France par l'Italie: Horapollon au XVI^e siècle,' in *Mélanges à la mémoire de Franco Simone: France et Italie dans la culture européenne* (Geneva, 1980), I, 555–72. For an excellent summary introduction to the subject of hieroglyphic studies in the Renaissance, consult the lecture by R. Wittkower, 'Hieroglyphics in the Early Renaissance,' orig. pub. 1972, rpt. in Wittkower's *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols* (Boulder, Colo.), 1977, pp. 113–28.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 1 Obelisk of the Pharaoh Sesostris (Rameses II), woodcut from the *Hieroglyphica* of Pierio Valeriano, 1556
- Fig. 2 Medal of L.B. Alberti with his hieroglyphic device of the Winged Eye
- Fig. 3 G.A. Dosio, Ancient Authors Explaining the Hieroglyphs Sculptured on an Obelisk, drawing from Dosio's Roman Sketchbook (Berlin)
- Fig. 4 Hieroglyphic Inscription for a Statue, woodcut from the *Hypnerotomachia Polifili*, 1499
- Fig. 5 Obelisk of Alexander the Great (Cleopatra's Needle), from A. Thevet, *Cosmographie du Levant*, 1575
- Fig. 6 Albrecht Dürer, The Emperor Maximilian, woodcut for the Arch of Maximilian, 1514

SIXTEENTH-CENTURY EMBLEMS AND IMPRESE AS INDICATORS OF CULTURAL CHANGE

Peter M. Daly

An emblem combines a symbolic picture with brief texts: usually motto, picture and epigram, often referred to as *inscriptio*, *pictura* and *subscriptio*, which are neutral Latin labels that do not specify a particular form or function. The emblem can be regarded as a *mode of thought* combining thing or word with meaning, and as an *art form* combining visual image and textual components (Schöne, Jöns, Daly 1979b). Attempts to define the genre of illustrated books called emblem books have not been overly successful. If definitions are too narrow they exclude too much; if definitions are too wide they embrace too much. The emblem is related to the *impresa*, which combines verbal and visual elements in a two-part form and which originates before the emblem itself. [On the emblem in Renaissance sign systems, see chapter 12 (iv). —ed.]

Most emblems and *imprese* were conservative in the root sense that they conserve, i.e., reflect and support the culture that produced them. However, emblems do reveal something of the confused situation articulated at times by a middle class caught up in the social, economic and epistemological changes of early modern Europe. To that extent, they indicate the beginnings of cultural change.

The emblematic mode helped shape the print and material cultures of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. To literary historians emblem *books* are the most widely known manifestation of this allegorical mode, but for historians of art and architecture the use of emblem and *impresa* in the material culture is even more important. In terms of reception, buildings may have been more influential than books. Let us take a seventeenth-century example from Nuremberg. The council room of the town hall was decorated with a series of emblematic paintings, and these were recorded in a book entitled *Emblemata politica*, printed in Nuremberg in 1617 and 1640 (fig. 1). Whereas the book was probably issued in only 200 or 300 copies,

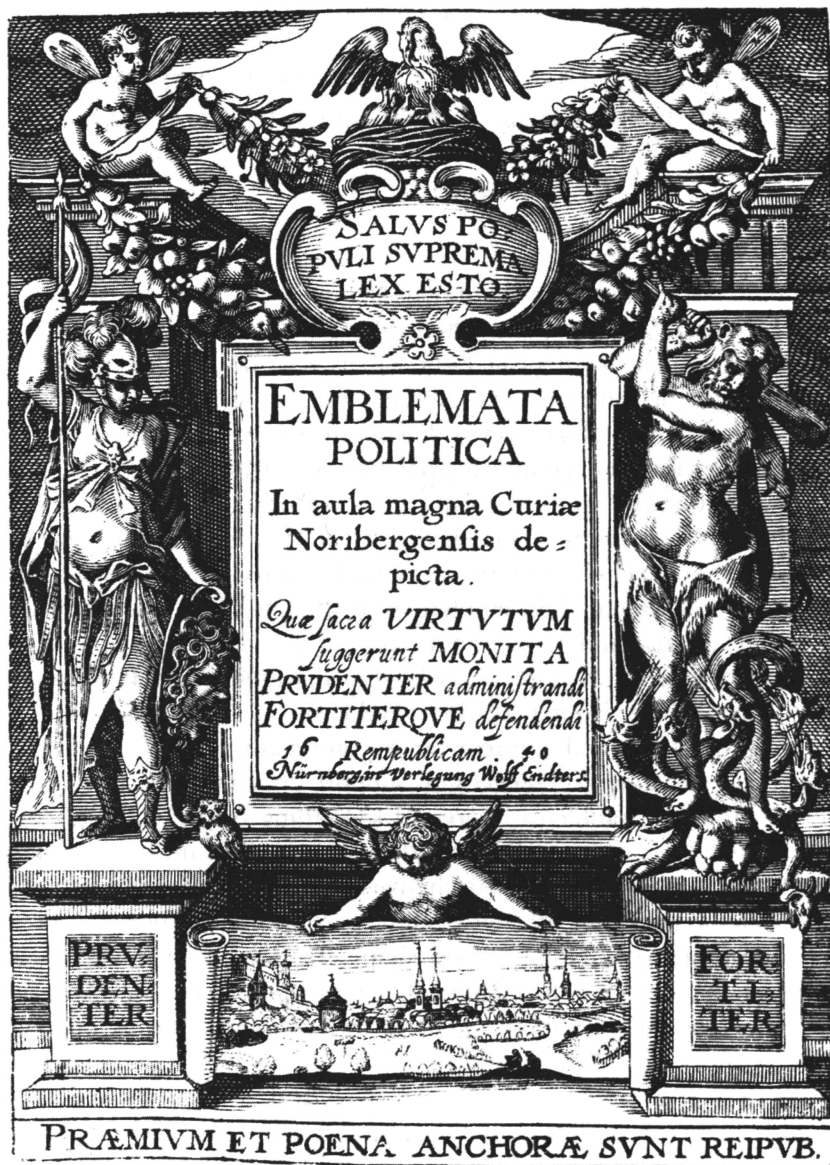


Figure 1

many hundreds, perhaps thousands of persons visited the Nuremberg town hall where these political emblems adorned the walls of the council room. As people waited here for appointments with officials and judges they doubtless pondered the emblematic decorations, which represent the social and political program of the governing oligarchy. Probably many more persons contemplated the decorations in the building than read the book.

Printed books of, or about, emblems and imprese were even more numerous than many historians of literature realise. Earlier estimates that the corpus comprises some 1,000 titles in about 2,000 printings are now known to be far too low. The Union Catalogue of Emblem Books,¹ a bibliographic database comprising titles from about 1500 to publications from the early 1900s in all languages, presently contains over 6,000 records.

'Emblem' originally meant mosaic, insert or inlay, and it is no coincidence that individual emblems make miniature statements complete in themselves. The emblem is closely related to collections of sayings and epigrams, florilegia and *loci communes*. In fact, emblems often derived from such collections, and later in turn emblems were plundered for commonplace books, and used in various ways in schools. [On various forms of 'condensed' expression in the development of commonplace books, see the conclusion of chapter 15. —ed.]

From the very beginning, emblems were printed in books containing scores, even hundreds of discrete and usually unrelated statements. Only from the end of the sixteenth century do specialised emblem books on love, stoicism, statecraft, princely power and achievements, and religion begin to appear.

Sixteenth-century treatises reveal a confusing use of terms, but the more personalised function and two-part form of the *impresa* clearly distinguish it from the more general application of the three-part emblem (Praz, Daly 1979a, Russell, Sulzer). The *impresa* was used long before Italian theorists turned it into a minor literary phenomenon, which had a peripheral role in poetological treatises. In fifteenth-century France and Burgundy *imprese* were part of ritualised court life. They found expression in festivals, tournaments, entries, and in the establishment of the Order of the Golden Fleece by the

¹ See Peter M. Daly, 'The Union Catalogue of Emblem Books Project and the *Corpus Librorum Emblematicum*,' *Emblematica* 3 (1988): 121–33.

Burgundian duke Philip in 1430–1, which marked a renewed accretion upon chivalry and the heroic. The *impresa* could also have political and military uses (Sulzer 86). The invading French forces under Charles VIII and Louis XII brought military and fashionable *imprese* to Italy, but *imprese* can be found earlier in the Florence of the Medici in the 1470s. Here Florentine bourgeois as well as aristocrats used *imprese*.

The *impresa* is a personal badge of an aristocratic or powerful bourgeois personage. It is an aspect of self-fashioning or self-representation. Initially symbolic statements inscribed on objects, i.e., belonging to the material culture rather than the print culture, such *imprese* were occasionally related to heraldry. Some *imprese*, e.g., tournament *imprese* at the Accession Day tilts in Elizabethan London,² were unique and particular to the event. In other words, they can only be interpreted when we know exactly who used the *impresa* on which occasion, and what the circumstances were. Other *imprese* became permanent badges of the person. The special meaning(s) of the motif were thus appropriated by the wearer.

One famous *impresa* will illustrate. Erasmus's *impresa* comprised the figure of the god Terminus with the motto 'Cedo nulli' [I yield to none] (fig. 2); it became his personal seal. In 1519 a medal was cut with Erasmus's head and on the reverse side a boundary stone inscribed 'Terminus' with the motto 'concedo nulli' accompanied by a second motto in Greek and Latin meaning 'Death the ultimate marker of things.' The *impresa* gave rise to a controversy, which demonstrates the extent to which *imprese* were identified with their bearers. Opponents criticised the arrogance of the *impresa* and its bearer. Erasmus sought to defend himself by insisting that the words 'I yield to none' belong to the figure Terminus or Death, not to himself. But that answer glosses over the fact that in the Cinquecento, i.e., in the circle around Aldus Manutius and Gyrardus, the figure of Terminus was a well-known personification of knowledge and its self-assertiveness, i.e., the assertive scholar himself (Sulzer 95–7).

Imprese occur as single and individual items; only much later would they be assembled into books, and then only after emblem

² See Alan R. Young, *The English Tournament Imprese* (New York, 1988), and his essay 'The English Tournament Imprese,' in *The English Emblem and the Continental Tradition*, ed. Peter M. Daly (New York, 1988), pp. 61–81. See also Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* (London, 1987).

HEROÏQUES.

103

Cedo nulli.



Le Dieu Terminus des Rommeins , qui mesmes ne Tite Liue.
ceda à Iupiter , estoit la Deuise d'Erasme , sur laquelle
un Cordelier nommé Caruayalus, lui improperoit & ob-
iectoit , que ce faisoit il par grande arrogance : comme
ne voulant (en sauoir) ceder à personne aucunement.
Combien toutefois qu'elle se puisse entendre de la Mort,
terme dernier & final de tous , que personne ne peut
oultrepasser. Responce aussi que fit Erasme audit Car-
uayalus.

S 4

Figure 2

books with their large collections of individual emblems had become popular. Printed collections of imprese took on a life of their own. The French writer Claude Paradin added commentary, which began to assume the function of the *subscriptio* of an emblem. His translators continued the implicit process of converting imprese into emblems, but that is a later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century development.³

Emblem is different from allegory when the latter is understood as an extended narrative allowing for different interpretations, because an emblem is essentially a single framed unit of text and graphic image, often consisting of no more than one page. However, the emblem may be regarded as a *miniature form of allegory* in the basic sense that the emblem contains a *res picta* that means more than it represents; it is a *res significans*, and it receives an interpretation and/or an application in the emblem itself. Thus the emblem can be regarded as a form of allegoresis, i.e., self-interpreting allegory. As a miniature form of allegory, the emblem communicates simultaneously through words and symbolic pictures. These two different symbol systems collaborate in the encoding of meaning. The reciprocal cross-referencing of text and image in the act of reading suggests that the picture is more than a mere illustration of the text. And the text does not always repeat the visual codes, which depend for their effect on the ability of the reader/viewer to identify picture content and recognise its inherent or assumed meaning. [On different versions of 'self-interpretation' in approaches to allegory from the late Middle Ages to the modern period, see chapter 2 (vi–vii), 12 (i, iv–v), 13 (conclusion), and 18–20. —ed.]

Encoding establishes the signification of a motif, figure or action, or the application of that signification. The figure of Brutus has been employed to signify such diverse notions as guilty conscience and the defeat of virtue. A snake can be an image of evil, but when it casts off its skin it can suggest moral or spiritual renewal. It can also signify death, or wisdom, or, as the German baroque writer Georg Philipp Harsdörffer observes, 'cleverness, poisonous slander'; 'when it has its tail in its mouth,' Harsdörffer continues, 'it is a representation of eternity' (*Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* [Frankfurt, 1647], Vol. 7, p. 98). [On the polyvalence of the snake, see chapters 12 (iii) and

³ Peter M. Daly, 'Paradin in Sixteenth-Century England: An Aspect of the Reception of Continental Imprese,' in *Emblematic Perceptions: Festschrift for William S. Heckscher*, ed. Peter M. Daly and Daniel S. Russell (Baden-Baden, 1997), pp. 61–91.

15. —ed.] In each case a given aspect of the creature or action becomes the basis for a signification that belongs to the species. At its clearest there will be a simple equation of thing and meaning, or image and meaning. Some of Andrea Alciato's tree emblems are of this kind. The cypress tree (1621 ed., no. 199) has three *subscriptions*, one of which is direct and unambiguous, identifying the cypress as the funereal tree which adorns the monuments of leaders. The significance is identified and communicated directly. Many, perhaps most emblems are, however, more complex. We need to recognise that emblems are not necessarily simple texts bearing single significances or unambiguous meanings. The Henkel-Schöne *Handbuch*, invaluable though it may be, is flawed through its assignment of meaning [*Bedeutung*] to each emblem. The Index of Meanings [*Bedeutungsregister*] wrongly encourages readers to assume that the meaning of a bi-medial, three-part emblem can be compressed into a phrase of three or four words.⁴

Alciato's Prometheus emblem will demonstrate the point (fig. 3). Typically the emblem begins with an abstract statement of theme in the motto: 'Quae supra nos nihil ad nos' [What is above us is of no concern to us]. The picture embodies this abstract notion symbolically in a male figure chained to a rock and attacked by an eagle. The knowing reader, then and now, will recognise the figure as Prometheus even before reading the text beneath the picture. The epigram relates briefly the situation:

Prometheus hangs eternally on the Caucasian rock;
his liver is being shredded by the talon of the sacred bird.
And he would wish not to have created man; despising potters,
he renounces the spark enkindled from the stolen fire.

The text explains in all brevity why Prometheus suffers the eternal punishment of having his liver torn out by Zeus's eagle. Prometheus had vied with the gods in creating man and stealing divine fire for mortals. The concluding lines apply the meaning in the human sphere, but not as a simple prohibition. We read:

⁴ As I have admitted elsewhere, I found myself locked into thinking in terms of *the* meaning of an emblem as I worked on the two Alciato volumes in the 'Index Emblematicus' series (cited in the list of 'Primary texts' following the main text of this essay). It only gradually dawned on me that the key words in my attempts to produce a statement of 'subject' or 'meaning' were invariably already found in at least one of the parts of the emblem.

QVÆ SVpra NOS NI-
hil ad nos.

B 4



*Caucasia eternū pendens in rupe Prometheus
Dirripitur sacri præpetis ungue iccus
Et nollet fecisse hominem, figulosq; posus
Accensa raptò damnat ab igne facem
Roduntur uarijs prudentum pectora curis
Qui coeli affectant scire deumq; uices*

Figure 3

The hearts of wise men, who aspire to know the changes
of heaven and the gods, are gnawed by various cares.

The encoding of Prometheus is anything but simple and direct. The message of this humanist emblem is addressed to 'wise men,' presumably philosophers and astrologers, who aspire to know things supernatural and divine. We are told their quest is fraught with cares, and when we combine this final sentence with the firm statement in the motto—'What is above us is of no concern to us'—recalling that Prometheus had been punished for betraying the secrets of the gods, then we are likely to conclude that the emblem as a whole is suggesting that even for wise men divine mysteries should remain mysteries, that there are some things humankind is not supposed to know or do.

The Prometheus emblem is characteristic insofar as a general moral is enunciated in the motto, embodied in the picture through the particular fate of Prometheus, which in turn is elucidated in the epigram; a general moral is affirmed by the configuration as a whole. It is also characteristic of the emblem at its most successful that motto, picture, and epigram cooperate in communicating a complex notion which is not fully contained in any one of the parts. Allegorical significance has not been encoded in two or three words, and therefore the notion conveyed by the complete emblem cannot be encapsulated in a brief statement.

As a mode of symbolic thought and expression which combines the visual with the verbal, thing and idea, pictured motif with concept, the emblem may be regarded as a mode of miniature allegory. What makes it work? What legitimises the combinations? Does the allegorization represent a discovery of 'inherent' significance or the creation of new meaning? What is the role of wit and conceit in the process? I do not believe that the esoteric and enigmatic⁵ are defining criteria of the emblem, but are hieroglyphs the basis, as some impresa and emblem writers seem to suggest, or was that fashionable name-dropping? [On Renaissance approaches to hieroglyphics, see chapters 12 (iii) and 15. —ed.] Is God's Book of Nature the foundation (Schöne, Jöns, Daly 1979b)? Is Aristotle or Plato the philosophical godfather? At different times in the history of modern discussions of

⁵ See Peter M. Daly, 'Emblem und Enigma: Erkennen und Erinnern,' in *Erkennen und Erinnern in Kunst und Literatur: Kolloquium Reimsburg, 4.–7. Januar 1996*, ed. Dietmar Peil, Michael Schilling and Peter Strohschneider (Tübingen, 1998), pp. 325–49.

emblem and impresa from Henry Green in the 1870s to William S. Heckscher in the 1990s one or more of these intellectual traditions have been privileged.

The motif with its attendant significances can rarely be used to identify even the broad source tradition, since motifs such as the beaver, pelican, phoenix and salamander⁶ will be encountered in hieroglyphic works like Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica*, in the *Physiologus* and bestiaries with Christian typological associations, in classical writers, in Renaissance imprese, emblem books and printers' devices (Daly 1979b, 78–99). Instead of identifying traditions one could ask about intellectual attitude to received tradition. Modern German theoretical discourse on the emblem (Schöne and Jöns) has redirected attention to its basis in medieval Christian exegesis, and especially Schöne has insisted on the ontological status of the emblem. Does this mean that the emblem is based on, or lays claim to, some kind of factuality or ontological truth? Is emblem based on verifiable empiricism, truth, or belief (Daly 1979b)? Does it substantially matter?

Schöne mistakenly argued for the 'potential facticity' and the ontological status of the emblematic *res*, suggesting that belief in this reality was essential (Schöne 28). For him the question 'credemus' [do we believe] destroys the emblem (Schöne 29). However, Geoffrey Whitney questions the factuality of the phoenix, and yet he still uses it seriously, expressing the hope that the town of Nantwich in Cheshire, which was destroyed by fire, will rise from its ashes like the phoenix (*A Choice of Emblemes*, 1586, p. 177). The basis is recognition and truth value, not zoological fact. Albertus Magnus had much earlier denied any factual, i.e., zoological basis for the beliefs surrounding the phoenix and pelican, but that did not prevent their use in imprese and emblems (Sulzer 134). Indeed, secular and religious writers would continue to appropriate these motifs with their religious meanings down into the nineteenth century, and businessmen would readily insert the salamander, pelican and phoenix into logos of insurance companies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The allegorical power of these creatures has nothing to do with their zoological reality. The attitude of Renaissance and baroque writers to hieroglyphs was similar to their attitude to nature and the Bible in that

⁶ The salamander functions as an impresa of François I in Paradin 1551, 1557, p. 16, Giovio, Typotius (1601–03); as a hieroglyphic in Valeriano (1556); and as an emblem in Camerarius (1604), Rollenhagen (1613), Wither (1635).

materials from these various traditions were regarded as bearing inherent significances that could be interpreted *in bonam partem* and *in malam partem*.

Encoding and decoding depend on recognition and acceptance. Emblems and imprese, like present-day advertising, appeal not so much to factuality or ontology as they do to a more flexible form of 'truth.' We are not persuaded by what we reject. 'Truth' or 'validity,' however, are established within different frames of reference. Mathematical and scientific criteria represent only one modern frame of reference. In *Emblem Theory* I tried to sketch out this issue, suggesting that knowledge is ultimately validated by a world-view rather than by a set of permanent standards for measuring a static 'truth' (Daly 1979b, 41). Most would agree with W.J.T. Mitchell's argument that 'knowledge [is] a social product, a matter of dialogue between different versions of the world, including different languages, ideologies, and modes of representations' (38).

The governing ideology—and I use the term neutrally—of the sixteenth century included conspicuously Neoplatonic and Christian features. This ideology produced a world-view, comprising a set of 'notional assumptions that act as a filter for knowledge, a framework within which knowledge has meaning and coherence, a basis upon which the validity of knowledge is tested' (Daly 1979b, 42). Empiricism joined, but did not always oust, traditionalist notions of Providence, history and natural law. In fact, where systems of truth collided, e.g., where empirical observation confronted received tradition, the emblem writer often knowingly chose scientifically false tradition. The French author of an influential treatise on imprese, Henri Estienne, approves of this because considerations of acceptance, communication and reception are more important than scientific truth (Daly 1979b, 43–4).

Emblems contain information of the most diverse kinds, which 'facticity' or scientific 'truth' would have filtered out if these had been governing principles. The authorities played a massive role in validating information, which then became the stuff of allegory. This touches on the question of the 'literal' sense of allegory and emblem as the basis of further encoding. We should recognise that emblems contain at least the following kinds of material, validated in different ways:

- 1) nature, verifiable by observation;
- 2) nature, accepted on the basis of traditional authorities;
- 3) classical history, accepted on the basis of traditional authorities;

- 4) mythology, legend and allegory, accepted on the basis of traditional authorities;
- 5) biblical information, including the miracles of the Old and New Testaments, accepted as a matter of faith and revelation;
- 6) hieroglyphs and hieroglyphic combinations with little or no basis in reality, with the status of hidden wisdom, accepted on the basis of traditional authorities (Daly 1979b, 44).

There is a long tradition of allegorical interpretation of classical and biblical figures and motifs. Does the emblem play a special or different role? How can we determine that role? A history of motifs in selected emblems may well tell us something about allegory and cultural change, because different emblem writers within different interpretive communities frequently encode the same materials differently. The term 'interpretive community' has much to recommend it because it appears to be a more flexible, inclusive and active term than 'reception.' But it is not without its inherent problems. What may it include? Is it a substitute for 'audience,' 'readership' and 'reception'? Does it exclude author, implying the irrelevance of author and authorial intention? And if so, are we left only with the interpreter and the interpretive community? Does that mean that the interpreter is now the authority? Are 'semantic autonomy' and 'unlimited semiosis' the result?

It goes without saying that later readers and writers, and indeed whole communities, can receive and change texts in ways that no longer correspond to the original intentions of the text or its maker. I do not wish to engage in recent theoretical disputes over intention and interpretation and over the alleged indeterminacy of language, disputes that have generated more heat than light. From my point of view at least, it is satisfying to see Umberto Eco reintroduce the notion of intention, distinguishing the intentions of maker, work, and reader.⁷ I do not share certain postmodern and deconstructionist views concerning the necessary indeterminacy of language and the impossibility of historical reconstruction. I believe that all communities and individuals within those communities establish conventions of agreement relating to the use and meaning of both words and images. Were it otherwise communication would never take place. [For some diverse theoretical and practical approaches to problems

⁷ See Umberto Eco, 'Interpretation and History,' in Umberto Eco et al., *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge, 1992).

of the 'literal' sense, authorial 'intention,' and historical 'reconstruction,' see especially chapters 2, 8–9, 11, and 14 on perspectives from antiquity to the Renaissance, and chapters 12 (v–viii) and 17–20 on perspectives from the eighteenth century to the modern period. For some general reflections, see chapter 1, especially i and iii. —ed.]

I shall include in 'interpretive community' both commentators and creators because the makers of texts and emblems are at the same time receivers and interpreters of tradition. We can safely assert that Andrea Alciato speaks to and for the international community of humanists. But he obviously does not address all the concerns of that community, and he also addresses concerns of more local interest. For example, his emblems are virtually silent on matters relating to Christianity, but that is not a generic limitation. Later the emblem would be virtually appropriated by the Society of Jesus for a variety of purposes. Some of Alciato's topics were of more local interest—Milan and his own situation—and these would have been of greater interest to a local Milanese or Italian community, although here, too, the emblems were capable of further allegorical application.

Alciato's sophisticated Neo-Latin made his emblems accessible to an international and learned readership. For which community does Alciato's translator Wolfgang Hunger speak? We would need to consider his introduction as well as his translated texts. He was a German lawyer and educator of young princes, but he published his German translation in France with Christian Wechel, and in a bilingual, Latin-German edition. Hunger's German texts would only have been of interest to German readers. But which and where? Do the German texts themselves provide any clues? Hunger did make changes in the process of translation. However, what allows us to equate these textual and interpretive differences with a certain community? To what extent may they perhaps be limited to Hunger? But then again once printed, distributed and received, these emblems work upon a readership. The emblem, like any other text or artefact, helps to create, to confirm, to modify or to subvert the very reality or community that it may also be said to reflect.

In 1586 Geoffrey Whitney published his 'translation' of a substantial selection of emblems and imprese originally published by Christopher Plantin in Antwerp and Leiden. For which interpretive community did he publish? The Leiden group of humanists? Or the Leicester circle? Or an English reading public? These can be regarded as overlapping circles.

Sixteenth-century emblem books are more or less unorganised collections of self-contained statements on a variety of topics. Emblem books do, however, provide evidence of ethical, social, political and religious principles, and occasionally economic concerns. Emblems and imprese tend to reflect dominant cultures rather than to advocate the need for change. To pillory excess, vice, or evil is not necessarily to espouse new models but rather to validate existing virtues that are being ignored. But some emblems do encode concerns that could be said to embody the beginnings of cultural change. Certain emblem writers of the sixteenth century reflect something of the ideology of the urban middle class with its early capitalism. These writers extolled the virtues of thrift, saving and accumulation, enterprise and industry, the work ethic and perseverance, and pride in ability and moderation. They castigated vices that represent the opposite. Some of the traditional virtues and vices appear, of course, but at times with modified encoding.

As in most other respects Italy led the way, and Florence is regarded as a paradigm of social, political and economic developments. The rise of banking, trade and the textile industry promoted the spirit of capitalism, which made a virtue out of amassing wealth. Medieval prohibitions of interest on capital were either ignored, or abolished—an action taken by the English parliament in 1545. Calvin defended the practice of charging interest. The Medicis and Bardis in Italy, the Fuggers (celebrated for their generosity by the Hungarian humanist Joannes Sambucus in an emblem [p. 78] of his *Emblemata* [Antwerp, 1564]) and the Welsers in Germany, and Gilbert Schoonbeke and Gillis Hooftmann in Antwerp represent the new spirit of early capitalism.⁸

The question of allegorical encoding and cultural change in the emblem genre must begin with a consideration of the *emblematum pater et princeps*, Andrea Alciato. It is a curious fact that in spite of the universal recognition accorded to Alciato, there is still no substantial monograph on his emblems. In 1989 William S. Heckscher published an exhaustive, if modestly titled, bibliographic listing containing 428 items,⁹ which deal with various aspects of Alciato and

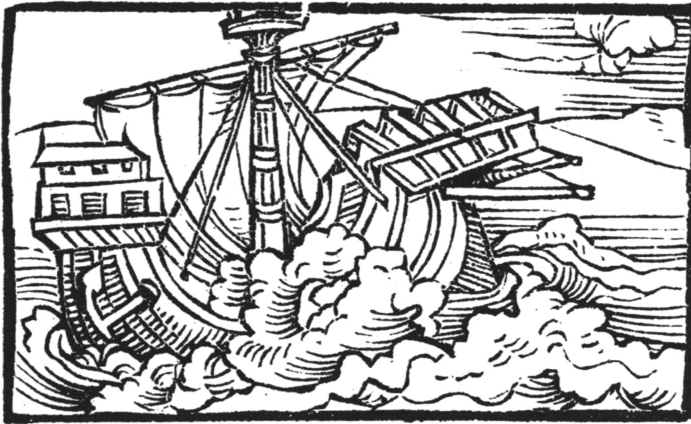
⁸ See August Buck, 'Einleitung: Renaissance und Barock,' in *Renaissance und Barock*, Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft 9 (Frankfurt am Main, 1972), pp. 6–8.

⁹ Heckscher 1989. The bibliography (pp. 245–96) is entitled 'A Selective List of Secondary Sources Dealing with Andrea Alciati and His Book of Emblems.'

his emblems. Although Heckscher lists 54 emblems that have received more detailed treatment, the fact remains that there is no systematic investigation of the 212 emblems that could begin to answer a number of urgent questions, only one of which concerns the relation of allegory to cultural change.

A conspicuous example of an Alciato emblem capable of suggesting both local and changing frames of reference is the ship emblem (fig. 4) with the *inscriptio* 'Spes proxima' [Hope is near at hand] (1531 edition, fol. B6v). The *pictura* shows a ship in heavy seas. In some editions two stars appear. The epigram is general, describing the ship buffeted by storms, about to founder; the only

SPES PROXIMA



Innumeris agitur respub. nostra procellis,
 Et spes uentura sola salutis adest.
 Non secus ac nauis medio circum æquore uenti,
 Quam rapiūt, salsis iamq; fatiscit aquis.
 Quod si Helenæ adueniant lucētia sydera fratres,
 Amissos animos spes bona restituit.

Figure 4

source of hope is identified as the stars, brothers of Helen, i.e., Castor and Pollux. Is this a general allegory of the ship of state, or may it be read more specifically? Not subscribing to the principle of the irrelevance of authors,¹⁰ I would want to know what Alciato was probably referring to. But for those who consider author and authorial intention irrelevant, the question remains: what does the emblem as a historical text refer to? What later readers or interpretive communities made of it is a different question.

Neither text nor picture provides any historically specific information. We can only make inferences. Although we cannot determine exactly in which year this emblem was composed, we do know that Alciato was writing the epigrams which became emblems in the 1520s. In a much-quoted letter to Francesco Calvo of January 9, 1523 (the date is in dispute),¹¹ Alciato reports: 'During the Saturnalia I composed a little book of epigrams to which I have given the title *Emblemata* . . .'¹² The ship emblem speaks of a series of hardships or misfortunes which had beset his native Milan. Between 1515 and 1530, such hardships included armed conflicts between foreign powers and the Sforza brothers, Massimiliano and Francesco, for control of Milan. These conflicts deeply affected Alciato's personal life, and in 1527 he left Milan. It seems likely that the reference in the ship emblem to the 'shining stars,' the 'brothers of Helen' (Castor and Pollux), as the only source of hope for what Alciato calls 'our state' ['respub.(lica) nostra'] is a reference to the Sforza brothers, dukes of Milan at different times during this period.¹³

This emblem of the ancient allegory of the ship of state was, I suggest, probably intended by Alciato to refer to the political, social and economic troubles that beset his native Milan in the early 1520s. He hardly needed to specify them, since the Milanese had experienced them. Hope for the city-state centred on the Sforza brothers, who ultimately freed Milan from the domination of the French and Spanish. The emblem was doubtless received by his north Italian

¹⁰ For a perhaps unfashionable restatement of the relevance of the author, see E.D. Hirsch, Jr., 'In Defense of the Author,' in *Intention and Interpretation*, ed. Gary Iseminger (Philadelphia, 1992), pp. 1–23.

¹¹ I follow Virginia Callahan's dating. See Callahan 1985, p. 24.

¹² Quoted from Virginia W. Callahan, 'A Comment on the 1531 Edition of Alciato's Emblems,' *Emblematica* 6 (1992): 203.

¹³ A fuller account of this emblem will be found in my essay, 'Alciato's "Spes Proxima" Emblem: General Allegory or Local Specificity?' *Emblematica* 9 (1996): 257–67.

readers as a reflection on Milan. Educated contemporaries in the Holy Roman Empire would also have grasped the allegorical significance.

What do Alciato's translators make of this emblem? Translators document reception, and usually for different interpretive communities. Jehan Lefèvre translates the ship emblem for the Paris 1536 edition (no. 34) as the 'public weal' ['La chose publique'], not Milan. His French readership would therefore relate the emblem to their own situations. By contrast, Wolfgang Hunger, publishing with the same Paris press, translates the emblem into German as referring to 'Milan, our home and state' ['Mayland vnser haymet, vnd stat' (1542, no. 34)], making explicit what had been implicit in Alciato's 'our state.' In his Spanish translation published in Lyons in 1549 (no. 34) Bernadino Daza speaks of 'our city' ['nuestra ciudad'], which becomes any reader's own city. The Italian Giovanni Marquale interprets the ship emblem as 'our life' ['nostra vita' (Lyons, 1551, no. 39)], thereby converting a political emblem into a general moral reflection on life relevant for any Italian reader. The second German translator Jeremias Held (Frankfurt am Main, 1566, no. 68; also 1580) extends Alciato's six-line *subscriptio* to a twelve-line epigram in which he expands on the original description, adding the names of Castor and Pollux for his readers. In the preface the German publisher Sigmund Feyerabend explains that Held's purpose in part was to make the emblems accessible to the common man ['gemeinen Mann,' fol. Biiiv]. Held applies the ship allegory to 'our commonwealth/state' ['unser Gmein'], which is buffeted 'by great misfortune, war and struggle' ['Von grossem vnglück Krieg vnd Streit'], so that only an unspecified hope remains. The explicit references to misfortune and war are unique in these translations and were not part of Alciato's original text, although they were political facts of Alciato's time. One would wish to know what was going on in the 1560s in the German lands, especially around Frankfurt am Main, or Nördlingen, a town with which Held was associated.¹⁴

¹⁴ Virtually nothing is known about Held beyond the fact that he was born in Nördlingen at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and was presumably educated there. His name occurs in no university books of immatriculation. The assumption that he may have been a physician derives from his name on the title page of a book of herbs and simples, published in Frankfurt in 1655 by the same Feyerabend who printed Held's German translation of Alciato in the same year. Nördlingen was an imperial free city with an industrial fair as significant as Frankfurt's; it had important trade connections with northern Italy, especially in textiles. A source of information on German towns in the period is the 'Centre for Early Modern German Literature' at the Universität Osnabrück, Germany.

Geffrey Whitney includes Alciato's ship emblem in his *A Choice of Emblemes* (1586, p. 137). Whitney retains the *pictura*, but writes a new *inscriptio*, 'Constantia comes victoriae' [Constancy the companion of victory], which gives the ship image a new meaning. It becomes an allegory of that constancy in adversity which ensures victory, and it is addressed to the 'man' who 'dothe saile theise worldlie seas . . .'. The ship of state has become a ship of life.

What do Alciato's commentators make of this emblem? I will take the latest of Alciato's commentators, Joannes Thuilius, who combined the commentaries of the earlier editors. Although the learned philologist concentrates on the classical and humanist sources or parallels, he does consider also the allegorical thrust of these emblems, commenting on the political events. But writing 90 years after the first publication of 104 emblems and 100 years after some of the epigrams had been written, his commentary differs from the explanation that I provided above. He prefaces his remarks by noting that they are 'conjecture' (p. 224), and he suggests that Alciato may have written the 'Spes proxima' poem at the time of the conference of Nice (p. 224)—which took place from May 15 to June 20, 1538—from which all hoped for peace. The conference of Nice included Pope Clement VII, the French king François I and the Habsburg emperor Charles V, all parties to the conflict for control of Milan.¹⁵ Thuilius is wrong in conjecturing that Alciato wrote the poem with the 1538 treaty of Nice in mind, because the emblem had been printed already in 1531. The image and text allow of such an interpretation, but it is the decoding of allegorical meaning by a later reader. The interpretation of the reader Thuilius nonetheless corresponds with the broad political intention of the text, which is not made geographically or historically specific (beyond the authorial 'our').

For Thuilius the ship is a Christian republic, and he reports that there are those who wish to understand by Castor and Pollux the Pope and Emperor (p. 225). Thuilius is speaking for an interpretive community of humanists, who have by this time decoded the two stars not as dukes of Milan, but as the greater luminaries, the Pope and Emperor. Thuilius repeats this identification in the final section of his commentary, 'Allegoria': the Pope and Emperor are Christian brothers of Helen, who is the Catholic Church (p. 227).

¹⁵ See R.J. Knecht, *Renaissance Warrior and Patron: The Reign of Francis I* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 386.

A review of Alciato's major topics suggests that he was a subtle if conservative thinker with attitudes usual for the time: he espoused the moral wisdom of his Christian-humanist age. However, some economic, social and political concerns surface in Alciato's emblems which appear to reflect cultural change. Some translations and adaptations further enhance the more worldly and materialist ideology occasionally implicit in such Alciato emblems. The most obvious of these have to do with wealth, accumulation and poverty. Alciato devised an emblem which depicts a scholar with a winged hand and a hand tied to a stone, embodying the idea that poverty restrains genius (fig. 5). Professors then and now complain that a low salary or inadequate research funding restrains genius. Wealth and austerity

PAUPERTATEM SUMMIS
ingenijs obesse ne prouehantur.



*Dextra tenet lapidem, manus altera sustinet alas.
Vt me pluma leuat, sic graue mergit onus
Ingenio poteram superas uolitare per arces
Me nisi paupertas inuida deprimeret.*

Figure 5

were not unknown to Alciato, who had left his professorship at Avignon in 1522 because of a dispute over his salary, spending the years in Milan apparently with little income.

The Paris editions gave the picture the symbolic form it would retain in subsequent editions and most translations. In this form the picture features a putto rather than a scholar, which can be decoded as referring to any person or profession. The German translator, Wolfgang Hunger, generalises through the use of 'many a man' ['Mancher'] who has inborn talent but is prevented by poverty from achieving 'high honours' ['hohen ehren']. 'Honours' is evidently meant here in its social and economic sense. All translators of Alciato stress poverty, but introduce no further changes.

In 1613 Gabriel Rollenhagen included in his collection of emblems (fig. 6) Alciato's famous motif of poverty restraining genius. But he added in the background a new, telling detail, the battle between David and Goliath. Rollenhagen's texts provide a secular moral and economic message, which is silent on the subject of the background scene of David's fight with Goliath. The motto reads 'Paupertate premor sublevor ingenio' [Through poverty I am held back, through genius I am lifted up]. The couplet epigram repeats the motto, linking the two statements negatively: poverty holds back genius.

Ut me pluma levat, sic sarcina praegravat ingens:

Paupertate premor sublevor ingenio.

[As the feather raises me up, so also the burden presses me down with its weight:

Through poverty I am held back, through genius I am lifted up.]

The background scene provides a biblical gloss to the foregrounded symbolic figure of restrained genius, which the epigram explicates solely in moral-economic terms. But what additional encoding is contributed by the intertextual visual detail of the battle between David and Goliath? One critic interprets David's victory in moral terms as the supremacy of cleverness, and 'victory over evil' ['Überwindung des Bösen'].¹⁶ Another critic interprets the scene spiritually: the battle between David and Goliath is a prefiguration of the struggle between Christ and the devil as tempter. Wolfgang Harms (1973) writes: 'The silent reference leads the reader to grasp the contrast

¹⁶ Carsten-Peter Warncke, in his edition of Rollenhagen's emblems, *Gabriel Rollenhagen: Sinn-Bilder: Ein Tugendspiegel* (Dortmund, 1983), p. 296.

42



Vt me pluma levat, sic sarcina prægravat ingens:
Paupertate premor sublevor ingenio.

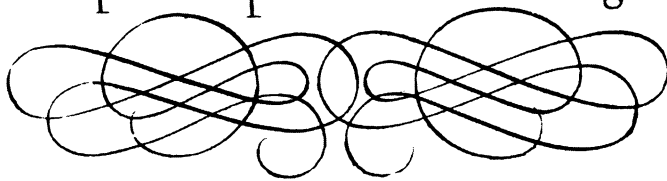


Figure 6

of *ingenium* and *paupertas* also in a spiritual sense; the unspoken intention may be the . . . contrast between damnation and grace ['Verdammnis und Gnade'], temporal and eternal ['Zeitlichem und Ewigem'], the flesh and the spirit ['Fleischlichkeit und Geist'] in the sense of the New Testament.¹⁷ In view of the limits of knowledge, what one sees depends in part on what one is looking for, and what one is capable of finding.

Rollenhagen's plates were acquired by George Wither (fig. 7) to illustrate the most beautiful emblem book ever produced in England, entitled *A Collection of Emblemes* (1635).¹⁸ Wither writes a mini-sermon in verse about this plate, describing and interpreting it for his own purposes. But that is not to say that the English Jacobean reader had nothing more to do than read the 30-line epigram to understand the emblem as a whole. Wither frequently leaves important visual details undiscussed. In the emblem of poverty restraining genius, Wither concludes by admitting that he was also such a man, who now realises that his own poverty was a '*Blessing*' in disguise, 'greater than my *Wit*.' In preaching Puritan-sounding virtues of contentment and patience, Wither ignores the background scene of David's battle with Goliath. But his reader cannot ignore it. It is not a mere decoration, but an intertextual communication, which either can be read as signifying the ultimate triumph of encumbered virtue and restrained genius—after all David defeats his adversary with a stone—or can be read typologically as the battle between good and evil. [On typological interpretation, see chapters 2 (iv) and 6. —ed.]

Economic concerns surface in a number of Alciato's emblems on woman and marriage. His attitude to woman, sex and marriage is a subject in itself, and the accentuations are sometimes revealing. More emblems deal with the dangers from harlots and adulterous wives than with the virtues of woman and wife. Much of Alciato's criticism has a monetary basis. Phryxus and Ocnus are among the classical witnesses for the prosecution. Phryxus riding the golden sheep across the Hellespont (1621 ed., no. 190) signifies the dull-witted but rich man manipulated by his wife or servant. The manip-

¹⁷ Harms, pp. 53–4.

¹⁸ Probably because it is the most beautiful and valuable book of its kind produced in England it has survived in more copies than any other English work of the genre. From bibliographic research, done in connection with the Union Catalogue of Emblem Books project, we know of 75 library locations for this book in Europe and North America.

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*My Wit got Wings, and high had flowne;
But, Povertie did keepe mee downe.*

42



ILLVSTR. XII.

Book. 3



Ou little thinke, what plague it is to bee,
In plight like *him*, whom pictur'd here you see.
His winged-Arme, and his up lifted-eyes,
Declare, that hee hath *Wit*, and *Will*, to rise:
The *Stone*, which clogs his other hand, may show
That, *Povertie* and *Fortune*, keepe him low:
And, twixt these *two*, the *Bodie* and the *Mind*,
Such labours, and such great vexations finde,
Thar, if you did not such mens wants contemne,
You could not chuse but helpe, or pirie them.
All Ages had (and, this I know hath some)
Such men, as to this misery, doe come:
And, many of them, at their *Lot*, so grieve,
As if they knew, (or did at least beleeeve)
Thar, had their *Wealth* suffiz'd them to aspire
(To what thei *Wits* deserve, and they desire)
The present Age and future Ages too,
Might gaine have had, from what they thought to doe.
Perhaps I dream'd so once: But, God be prais'd,
The *Clow* which kept me downe, from being rais'd,
Was chain'd to fast, that (it such *Dreames* I had)
My *thoughts*, and *longings*, are not now so mad.
For, plaine I see, that, had my *Fortunes* brought
Such *Wealth*, at first, as my small *Wit* hath sought;
I might my selfe, and others, have undone,
Instead of *Curses*, which I thought to runne.
I finde my *Povertie*, for mee was fit;
Yea and a *Blessing*, greater than my *Wit*:
An't, whether, now, I *rich* or *poore* become,
Tis nor much *plasing*, nor much *troubling*.

Figure 7

ulation has economic consequences. Ocnus (fig. 8) toils away spinning rope, which is devoured by his 'she-ass' ['asella'] (1551 ed., p. 99). The epigram makes it clear that the 'lazy woman' takes and squanders the husband's accumulated wealth. But whereas the epigram speaks of wife, the motto identifies the woman as harlot: 'Ocni effigies. De his qui meretricibus donant, quod in bonos usus verti debeat.' [A picture of Ocnus; on those who give to harlots what should be turned to better use.] Interestingly, Alciato condemns harlots and their patrons on economic grounds: the money should be put to better use! The condemnation of the wife in the epigram is more serious, since it was the wife's duty to manage and protect the husband's wealth and income; the harlot had no such responsibility. Emblem 73 condemns stupid men ['fatuus'] who allow parasites and harlots to enjoy their wealth, while just men gain no advantage.

Common to many of these emblems is the recognition of the importance of earning and retaining wealth. 'Thrift' is not a word used, but it is a virtue implied through its very absence. When Whitney adopts the Ocnus emblem (fig. 9), he writes a new motto, 'Labor irritus' [Labour in vain (p. 48)], which omits all reference to harlots. Whitney interprets Ocnus as a man who 'workes and toiles,' while the ass is a 'wicked wastfull wife' who 'quicklie spendes and spoiles' what he had worked for. But the final couplet recreates the sense of Alciato's original Latin motto which Whitney had chosen not to translate. The picture 'declares' those 'that lewdely doo bestowe / Suche thinges, as shoulde vnto good vses goe.' Whitney castigates sexual and financial profligacy.

Alciato's Ocnus motif, albeit with a different meaning, had appeared earlier in Elizabethan England, in a setting in the material culture where it is encoded with a decidedly entrepreneurial significance. John Harvey, father of the scholar and poet Gabriel Harvey, was a successful yeoman farmer, rope-maker and businessman in Saffron Walden, Essex. Sometime around 1570 he decorated the fireplace in the parlour of his town-house with a large mantle-piece (fig. 10; see Daly and Hooper). The emblematic decoration is based on three Alciato emblems which receive new mottoes. Ocnus the rope-maker is centred, flanked by the ass eating thistles, and the beehive. The emblematic programme celebrates the new capitalist virtues of labour and effort. A burdened ass eats thistles with the motto 'Aliis non nobis' [For others not for ourselves]; centred is Ocnus making rope destroyed by an ass with the motto 'Nec aliis nec nobis' [Neither

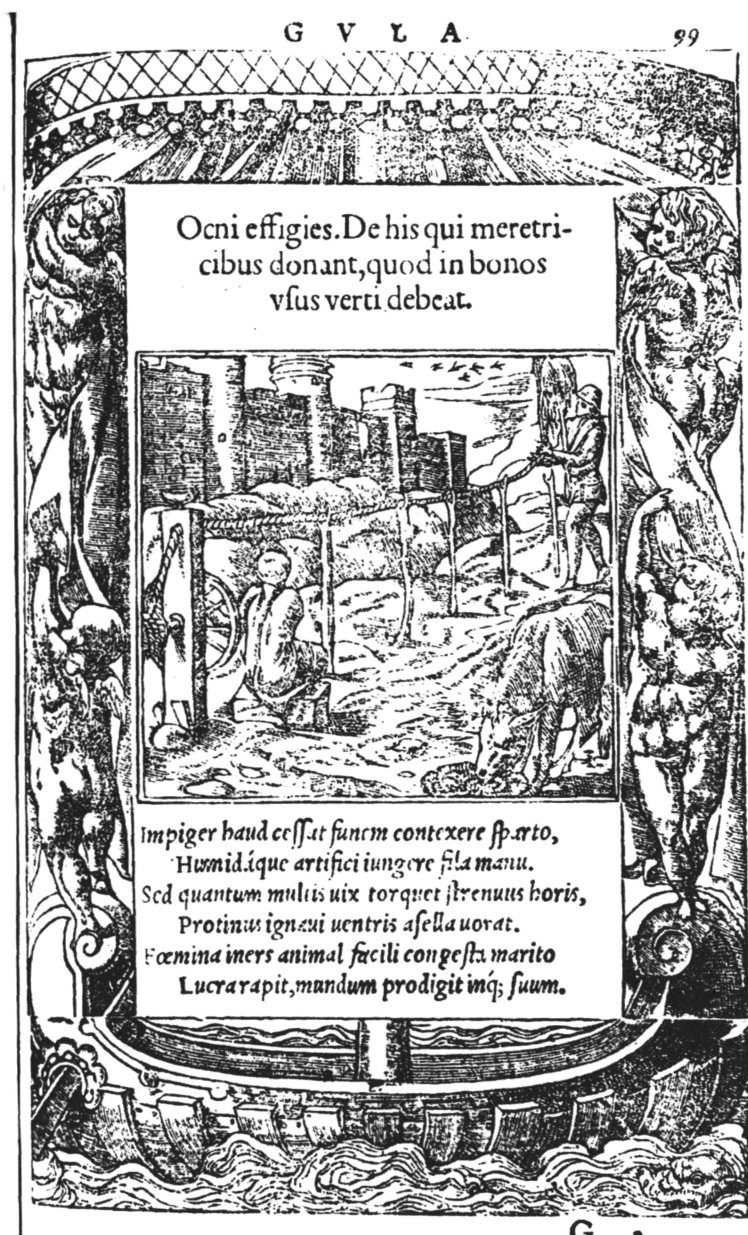


Figure 8



HEARE, Ocnus still the roape doth turne and winde,
Which he did make, of rushes and of grasse:
And when with toile, his worke was to his minde
He rol'de it vp, and lefte it to the asse:
Whoe quickelie spoilde, that longe with paine was sponne,
Which being kept, it might some good haue donne.

This Ocnus shewes, a man that workes and toiles,
The Asse declares, a wicked wastfull wife:
Whoe if shee maie, shee quicklie spendes and spoiles
That he with care, was getting all his life,
And likewise those, that lewdely doo bestowe
Such things, as shoulde vnto good vses goc.

Iuuenalis 6.

*Prodiga non sentit preunte semina sensum:
At, velut exhausta rediuius pullulet arca
Nummus, & è pleno semper tollatur acrio,
Non vnquam reputant quanti sua gaudia consist.*

In eum

Figure 9

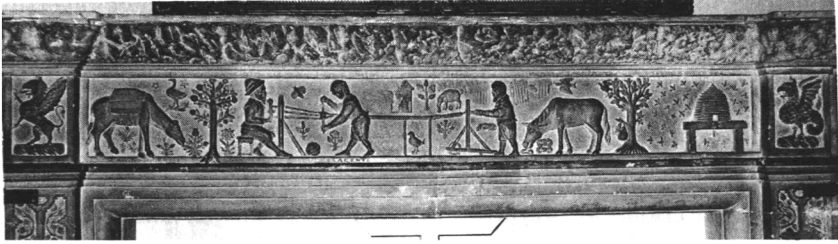


Figure 10

for others nor for ourselves]; bees return to the hive with the motto 'Aliis et nobis' [For others and ourselves]. The three panels make a statement about labour and reward, moving from the negative to the positive. Alciato's emblems have been re-encoded to make an economic and moral statement about labour and profit. This notion is then encapsulated in a motto that literally underlines the three panels, i.e., is written beneath the three emblems. Emendated it reads 'Nostrae placentiae sunt labor' [Our cakes are our labour], i.e., our labour brings its own rewards. Alciato's warning about spendthrift wives or harlots is re-encoded as a celebration of mercantile entrepreneurship. [On allegory and the transfer of old idioms to new ideologies, see chapter 1. —ed.]

The early modern period witnessed a revaluation of work, skills and crafts. One expression of this is found in Jost Amman's *Ständebuch* (1568), depicting representatives of mid-sixteenth-century German trades and professions. Not simply realistic, these illustrations make social, political and economic comment on the times and the third estate of labour. Amman's book has been regarded as 'a contribution to political iconography'¹⁹ of the imperial free city of Nuremberg. Already by the early fifteenth century, the artisan and the merchant had joined the rural peasant as representatives of the estate of 'labour.' Early modern programmes of religious art retained the traditional figure of the agricultural worker because work was also regarded as the result of the Fall of man. Whereas the paintings commissioned for churches retain the traditional figure, woodcuts, which were

¹⁹ See Rolf Dieter Jessewitsch, *Das 'Ständebuch' des Jost Amman (1568). Zur ständepolitischen Ikonographie der Reichsstadt Nürnberg in der deutschen Druckgraphik des XVI. Jahrhunderts.* Kunstgeschichte: Form und Interesse 18 (Münster, 1987), p. 9.

intended for a wider and urban readership, show a greater diversity in the depiction of labour. Amman's attitudes to the third estate of labour range from support through satire to politically tendentious comment, which can be anti-feudal. In general, one finds pride in the skills and crafts represented.

Alciato was an urban professional and humanist. Trade, commerce, and crafts do not attract his attention in the emblems. Law, justice, good governance, peace and the moral life concern him more. Part of that concern, however, focusses on the uses of wealth, on usury and poverty.²⁰ In the context of Alciato's 212 emblems such economic and social comment is a minor if overlooked aspect. While their importance should not be exaggerated, these concerns bespeak changes taking place in the culture of the time.

Later sixteenth-century German writers such as Mathias Holtzwardt reveal more clearly such newer mercantile or capitalist attitudes, although these attitudes do not dominate, and they often appear together with emblems espousing different values. In his essay 'Social Content in Mathias Holtzwardt's *Emblematum Tyrocinia*'²¹ Ken Fowler discusses in detail two representative emblems. In emblem 24 Holtzwardt provides four reasons for marriage, 'Warumb man heürathen soll' [Why one should marry (fig. 11)]. The first three are traditionally Christian: one should marry to avoid concupiscence, produce children, and have companionship. The fourth is new: to increase wealth. The epigram puts it succinctly as 'Dein haab vnd gut auch mehrst damit' [You increase your wealth and property thereby]. The *pictura* accurately encodes these four reasons. A naked man and woman clasp hands, indicating companionship; the man pours water on Cupid's weapons, suggesting the overcoming of concupiscence; a child sits between the two adult figures as their offspring; and a model house rests on the shoulders of the man and woman, representing the property to be enhanced through marriage. 'Marriage and accumulation are,' as Fowler observes, 'mutually reinforcing social goods'

²⁰ Alciato treats avarice (nos. 85, 86, 90), the greed of heirs (159), the criminal greed of princes (nos. 147, 148), usury (138), racketeering (89), poverty (66) and reward through perseverance (36).

²¹ *Emblematica* 4 (1989): 15–38. For further studies of Holtzwardt, see Holger Homann, *Studien zur Emblematik des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Utrecht, 1971), who does not deal with these social and economic issues, and the essay by Peter von Döffel and Klaus Schmidt in their edition of the 1581 edition of *Emblematum Tyrocinia* (Stuttgart, 1968), pp. 207–35.

EMBLEMA. XXIIII.

Quare contrahendum Matrimonium.



Coniugium quisquis tibi uis componere felix,
 Deliciae non sint proxima cura tibi,
 Sed potiùs, pulchram ut possis producere prolem,
 Quaeque salax deamat, tu fuge stupra, caro.
 Coniugis auxilioque pari et solamine dulci
 Traducas uitam, res cumulesque tuas.

Warumb man heürathen soll.

Wilt heürathen mein lieber freünt
 Soltu dessen nicht sein gesint
 Das du wölst allein den wollust
 Suchen / vnd deines fleisches durst¹
 Sonder vil mehr das hie auff erden
 Fromme kind von dir zeüget werden
 Demnach das du fleichst² hürerey
 Da nie nichts gûts ye ware bey
 Vnd dan das du ein ghülffen habst
 Mitt welchem dus mit frewden wagst
 Inn wol in weh zu aller zeit
 Dein haab vnd gût auch mehrst damit.

Figure 11

(19). The Reformation had led to a revaluation of both wealth and marriage, all the more so as for Protestants celibacy was no longer required of priests.

Whereas the marriage emblem validates the accumulation of wealth and property, emblem 27 (fig. 12) with its Latin motto 'Domus amica, domus optima' and proverbial German motto 'Eigner Herdt ist Golds werdt' [One's own hearth is worth gold] advocates thrift while noting anti-social effects. The snail of the picture, and the turtle of the Latin text, which carries its house with it, exemplify the virtue of domesticity and the value of owning one's own home. In the last four lines, however, other concerns surface. The sentence begins positively, apparently praising thrift: 'O wie glücklich ist der man / Welcher das sein behalten kan' [Oh, how happy is the man, / Who can keep his own possessions]. Implied are unspecified threats to possessions, which can be irretrievably lost through inflation or bankruptcy, not to mention profligate spending. Thrift safeguards accumulated wealth and is therefore 'one of the cardinal middle class virtues' (Fowler 28). The German epigram ends with the spectre of poverty forcing the man who could not keep his own possessions to seek in vain for charity or loans. Published in 1581, this emblem must be read in the context of economic developments in Alsace during the preceding two decades, which had brought inflation, steep increases in the price of foodstuffs, economic crises and increasing bankruptcies.

We are not surprised to find emblems expressing concern over the love of money. Holtzwardt modifies Alciato's image of poverty restraining genius so that the male figure has inverted wings on both hands, and his leg is tied to a money bag. Holtzwardt thus reverses Alciato's meaning. The poverty that restrained Alciato's scholar becomes wealth that holds back a person from reaching God: 'Besser arm vnd from dan reich vnd böß' [Better poor and good than rich and evil].

I will conclude with the example of George Wither. His emblem (Book 2, no. 24) with Alciato's motto 'Omnia mecum porto' [I carry all with me] also features the tortoise, which exemplifies stoic self-reliance, and moral and spiritual values. But even here we notice economic comments that have little to do with the moral theme. The tortoise is praised because its shell 'Becomes that *house*, where he doth rent-free dwell.' The first adversity named is the theft of treasures and '*outward meanes*.' In an emblem on Pegasus (Book 2,

EMBLEMA. XXVII.

Domus amica, domus optima.



Natura exemplo nobis ipsa indicat, esse
 Nil melius, propria quàm latitare domo.
 Cernimus ut terris serpat testudo, suamque
 Conseruet tergo sustineatque domum.
 Deserit hanc nunquam, coeli dum uescitur aura,
 Dulceque subiecto corpore gestat onus,
 Sic felix, partis qui nouit parcere rebus,
 Nilque alios curat, uiuat ut ipse sibi.

Eigner Herdt ist Golds werdt.

Es ist nichts nutzlicher auff Erd
 Dan Kochen auff seim eigen herd
 Wie man sieht das die schneck ihm thut¹
 Die ihr hauß hatt inn solcher hût
 Das sie dasselb nicht last von ihr
 Sonder tregts mitt ihr für vnd für
 So lang sie lebt vff diser erd
 Sie solchs erhelt hats lieb vnd werd
 O wie glücklich ist der man
 Welcher das sein behalten kan
 Das er keim andern komm für thür
 Vnd mit spott werd gewisen für².

Figure 12

no. 43) Wither begins with a satirical aside on the profligate spending of some men whose *'fleet-horses'* have bankrupted their owners: 'Have runne their *Masters*, out of their estate.' Rollenhagen's love emblem (Book 2, no. 6) with the picture of the self-extinguishing torch becomes a plea for the *'golden Meane,'* which when exceeded brings 'losse, and ruine.' While Wither relates this to love, passion and pleasure, he uses the occasion to comment on the social and moral decline that can accompany the success of those who 'climed higher.' He castigates those who were charitable when poor, but are 'hard-hearted' when rich. Like Holtzwart Wither seems to be reacting to social and moral fissures opening up under economic strains. In an emblem on affliction (Book 2, no. 46) Wither denounces the *'Worldly rich'* with 'large Possessions . . . Gay Clothes, fine Furnitures, and Houses brave.' An emblem on inner rectitude (Book 3, no. 1) rejects 'dunghill-tops / Of temp'rall *Riches*' as well as 'airie *titles*.' Honest effort does not seek dishonest reward (Book 3, no. 5), and Wither insists that we should not wish to be reckoned with

Those thriving men, who purse up ev'ry day,
For *twelve houres labour* more then *twelve months pay*.


Very occasionally Wither devotes one of his 200 emblems to a socio-economic issue. An emblem in Book 3 (no. 27 [fig. 13]) deals with a problem of no small consequence in seventeenth-century England: land encroachment. Wither uses Rollenhagen's Terminus emblem with Erasmus's motto in the form 'Nulli concedo' [I yield to none] for an attack on those who disregard '*Bounder-Stones*' and make '*incroachments*, where they have no *right*.' He describes the earlier practise of the communal annual inspection of parish limits and property boundary stones, so that 'ev'ry man might keep his owne *Possessions*.' Now boundary stones are broken or removed, giving rise to disputes. Those who neglect the 'sacred *Bounders*' are denounced as '*Incroachers*,' '*Intruders*' and '*Vsurpers*' who steal from prince, parent and the '*Common-weale*,' even intruding on '*Christ's Inheritance*.'

In the beehive emblem (Book 4, no. 42) Wither makes a frontal attack on the exploitation of labour and thrift. Rollenhagen's motto 'Non nobis' [Not for ourselves] is sharpened into a denunciation in Wither's new English motto:

Wee, bring the Hony to the Hive;
But, others, by our labours thrive.

I was erected for a Boind,
And I resolve to stand my ground.

161



ILLVSTR. XXVII.

Book, 3

THe *Bounder-Stones*, held sacred, heretofore,
Some did so superstitiously adore,
As, that they did not onely rev'rence doe them,
But, have ascrib'd a kinde of *God head*, to them:
For, *Terminus* had many a *Sacrifice*,
As well as other senselesse *Deities*.
I am not so prophane, as to desire
Such *Ertnick* zeale should set our hearts on fire:
But, with I could, Men better did regard
Those *Bounders*, which *Antiquity* hath rear'd;
And, that, they would not, with so much delight,
There, make *incroachments*, where they have no *right*.
That, ev'ry man might keep his owne *Possessions*,
Our Fathers, us'd in reverent *Processions*
(With zealous prayers, and with praisefull cheere)
To walke their *Parish limits*, once a yeare:
And, well knowne *Markes* (which sacrilegious Hands
Now cut or breake) so bord'ring out their Lands,
That, ev'ry one distinctly knew his owne;
And, many brawles, now rise, were then unknowne.
But, since neglected, sacred *Bounders* were,
Most men *Incroachers*, and *Intruders* are:
They grieve each other, and their *Dues* they steale,
From *rince*, from *Parent*, and from *Common weale*.
Nay, more; these bold *Vsurpers* are so rude,
That, they, on *Christ's* Inheritance intrude.
But, that will be aveng'd; and (on his *right*)
Though such *incroach*, he will not lose it quite:
For, hee's that *Bounder*, and that *Corner stone*,
Who all confines, and is confin'd, of none.

Z. 2

Where

Figure 13

The plight of bees who languish in the empty hive after producing a rich harvest of honey is couched in terms of human labourers who, tired from their labour, are either 'fir'd' for their 'good service,' or provided a 'slender diet' by those who appropriate their production, taking 'no care, though all the swarme be starved.' Wither then compares bees with the man who 'spends his youthfull time in honest thrift' only to be 'bereft' of 'all his labours.' The exploiters are false neighbours and enemies, but also '*Lords, or Landlords.*' Wither concludes the epigram with the translation of the full implication of the Latin motto: '*Not for themselves, but others, they have wrought.*'

Emblems do reveal something of the confused situation facing the middle class caught up in social and economic changes as early modern Europe went through its proto-capitalist phase. Epistemological difficulties, only partly perceived by those caught up in the changing economies, can be discussed in terms of the new meanings that were being attached to notions of time and space, and work and wealth. Emblems can also be read for what they tell us of the tensions and discontinuities that writers and readers experienced between their beliefs and ideological commitments (e.g., a static and hierarchical social order) and the experience of the new power of accumulated wealth, or the effects of inflation, or the loss of old markets. Economic concerns have social impact, but they are not so much reflections as causes of social change, and they thus deserve to be treated separately. While such economic concerns are seldom the theme of an emblem, they emerge in emblems on a variety of different topics.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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- Fig. 2 Erasmus's impresa of the god Terminus with motto 'Cedo nulli' [I yield to none] as reproduced in Claude Paradin, *Devises Heroïques* (Lyons, 1557), p. 103.
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- Fig. 12 Mathias Holtzwardt, *Emblematum Tyrocinia* (Strassburg, 1581), emblem 27 on owning one's own home: 'Eigner Herdt ist Golds werdt' [One's own hearth is worth gold].
- Fig. 13 George Wither, *A Collection of Emblemes* (London, 1635), Book 3, no. 27. Terminus with motto 'Nulli concedo' [I yield to none].

D. EIGHTEENTH- TO
TWENTIETH-CENTURY
THEORIES OF ALLEGORY

**VERA NARRATIO:
VICO'S NEW SCIENCE OF MYTHOLOGY**

Joseph Mali

In the year 1687 Sir Isaac Newton published his great work on the *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, universally known as the *Principia*. 'These Principles,' Newton wrote, are not some 'occult Qualities' which cannot be observed and tested, like metaphysical entities, but are those physical properties and forces—like cohesion of bodies, inertia, or gravity—which form and govern the movements of all natural things in the world, and might therefore be rightly called the 'general Laws of Nature.'¹ Few people have actually read, and fewer understood, Newton's work, but his empirical method and world-view were soon widely accepted as valid—in the natural, as well as in the human, sciences.² In order to know anything human—a word, an idea, a custom, a whole society or civilization—it was necessary to discover its 'principles,' those primal elements which had generated it. As Giambattista Vico asserted: 'Theories must start from the point where the matter of which they treat first began.'³

This was the 'controlling methodological postulate' of Vico's major work, the *New Science* of 1725, which in an early draft seems to have had the title, *New Science concerning the Principles of Humanity*.⁴ Vico's

¹ Isaac Newton, *Opticks*, rpt. of the 4th edn. (London, 1931), pp. 401–2.

² On Newton's reputation in the Enlightenment, see Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, Vol. II: *The Science of Freedom* (London, 1970), pp. 126–66.

³ See *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, N.Y., 1968), paragraph 314; I have adjusted the translation. Subsequent references to Vico in this translation (from the third edition of the *New Science*) are cited as *NS*, followed by / and the standard paragraph number(s). For a more extensive discussion of issues raised in my essay, see my book, *The Rehabilitation of Myth: Vico's 'New Science'* (Cambridge, 1992), on which this essay draws.

⁴ See Max Harold Fisch, Introduction to *NS*, pp. xix–xx, who also notes the title of the first edition: *Principles of a New Science concerning the Nature of the Nations, by which are found the Principles of Another System of the Natural Law of the Gentes*.

debt to Newton is evident. He in fact sent his book to Newton, but Newton, by then already very old, probably never read it.⁵ Vico, setting out from the assumption that 'the nature of institutions is nothing but their coming into being at certain times and in certain guises,' sought to discover in 'the deplorable obscurity of the beginnings of the nations and in the innumerable variety of their customs' the 'principles of humanity,' namely, those primal capacities of human beings which, much like Newton's 'principles of nature' but in a different sphere, have formed and govern their social life and history.⁶ However, though Vico moulded his work on Newton's scientific methodology, he eventually inverted its premises. He came to maintain that his new science of humanity was not only more 'certain' than the science of nature, because it relied on a more intimate knowledge of its object, but was also more 'true,' because it processed a better kind of knowledge: that of the one who has made the object. Vico celebrated this seminal illumination in some memorable words:

But in the night of thick darkness enveloping the earliest antiquity, so remote from ourselves, there shines the eternal and never failing light of a truth beyond all question: that the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind. Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers should have bent all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which, since God made it, He alone knows; and that they should have neglected the study of the world of nations, or civil world, which, since men had made it, men could come to know.⁷

This passage is often quoted and discussed by theorists of the human sciences, who rightly regard it as one of the most significant contributions to the formation of their historicist methodology.⁸ Yet very few of them, if any, have realized that the actual method of inquiry that Vico had in mind pertains to 'historical mythology'; i.e., Vico believed that the archaic narratives of 'fabulous beginnings' in which the peoples of ancient civilization preserved 'the memories of

⁵ On this and other intellectual traditions that inspired Vico's *New Science* see my *Rehabilitation of Myth*, cited above in n. 3, pp. 16–41 et passim.

⁶ *NS*/147, 344.

⁷ *NS*/331.

⁸ For comprehensive reviews of this notion see Rodolfo Mondolfo, *Il 'verum-factum' prima di Vico* (Napoli, 1969); Karl Löwith, *Vicos Grundsatz: Verum et factum convertuntur: Seine theologische Prämisse und deren säkulare Konsequenzen* (Heidelberg, 1968); Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder* (London, 1976), pp. 21–38.

the laws and institutions that bind them in their societies' were the earliest, and therefore the best, sources of the 'principles of humanity.'⁹ Moreover, these sacred narratives were, in his account, the means by which we could study other human beings and societies which are 'so remote from ourselves' that encountering such narratives might enable us to 'descend from these human and refined natures of ours to those quite wild and savage natures, which we cannot at all imagine and can comprehend only with great effort.'¹⁰ This effort was crucial to Vico's new science of humanity because if, as he maintained, the 'truth' about the 'civil world'—how men had made it and why, therefore, men could come to know it—hinged on the fact that 'its principles are to be found within the modifications of our own human mind,' then it was necessary to retrieve these archaic principles from within our modern minds and cultures. Vico, in other words, claims that our ability to understand how men in 'earliest antiquity' had made *their* world guarantees that we could come to know what *our* world is. And we can do so because, and only insofar as, we share those archaic patterns of thought which enabled them to know and to make this world—the myths which still persist in our minds and cultures in a variety of forms: in linguistic metaphors, literary idioms, religious rites, moral rules, political institutions, national traditions, and so on. [On earlier versions of the effort to expose foundational principles by exploring mythology, see chapters 2 (i and vii), 3, 10, 12 (ii), and 14. —ed.]

Ernst Cassirer was therefore right to praise Vico as 'the true discoverer of myth.'¹¹ By which he meant to suggest that Vico was the first theorist who conceived myth as a new kind of knowledge, literally a *scienza nuova*, replete with its own epistemic, aesthetic, and linguistic configurations. While this observation is certainly correct, it obscures the fact that, for Vico, the investigation of mythology was primarily historical rather than philosophical, intensely anthropological rather than merely philological.¹² Assuming that the ancient

⁹ NS/201–3.

¹⁰ NS/338.

¹¹ Ernst Cassirer, *The Problem of Knowledge*, trans. W.H. Woglom and C.W. Hendel (New York, 1950), p. 296.

¹² As Gianfranco Cantelli has observed: 'The common tendency of the majority of Vico's interpreters has been to approach the problem [of myth] from a point of view too exclusively aesthetic and linguistic, which has left obscure the perhaps decisive fact that, for Vico, the investigation of the origins of poetry grew out of a

myths encode the innermost motivations which drove man to make up, and still sustain, those 'human institutions' which have proven crucial for 'the preservation of the human race,' Vico sought to decipher in their images and tales the deep reasons of the 'principles of humanity.' 'Our mythologies agree with the institutions under consideration, not by force and distortion, but directly, easily, and naturally. They will be seen to be civil histories of the first peoples, who were everywhere poets.'¹³ Hence his conclusion:

It follows that the first science to be learned should be mythology or the interpretation of fables; for, as we shall see, all the histories of the gentiles have their beginnings in fables, which were the first histories of the nations. By such a method the beginnings of the sciences as well as of the nations are to be discovered, for they . . . had their beginnings in the public needs or utilities of the peoples and were later perfected as acute individuals applied their reflection to them.¹⁴

'Mythology or the interpretation of fables' was, then, the 'first science' of Vico's *New Science*. And he duly turned it into a new science by grounding the classical myths in the actual norms and forms of life of the peoples in ancient civilization, which were, in his account, utterly primitive. His descriptions of the 'first men' are clearly moulded in the fashion of Lucretius and Hobbes.¹⁵ 'In their monstrous savagery and unbridled bestial freedom,' he says, these people 'must have done their thinking under the strong impulsion of violent passions, as beasts do.'¹⁶ [On the relation between such views and eighteenth-century approaches to mythology, see chapter 12 (v). —ed.] They could not possibly have known all the sublime meanings that later mythographers ascribed to their myths.

From these first men, stupid, insensate, and horrible beasts, all the philosophers and philologists should have begun their investigations of the wisdom of the ancient gentiles. . . . And they should have begun with metaphysics, which seeks its proofs not in the external world but

predominantly historical inquiry and that his true intention was less to establish the manner in which poetic language was born than to examine the function of myths, to clarify the origins of religion, and to determine its role in the civil development of mankind'; see Cantelli, 'Myth and Language in Vico,' in *Vico's Science of Humanity*, ed. G. Tagliacozzo and D.P. Verene (Baltimore, 1976), p. 48.

¹³ *NS*/352.

¹⁴ *NS*/51.

¹⁵ See Amos Funkenstein, 'Natural Science and Social Theory: Hobbes, Spinoza, and Vico,' in *Vico's Science of Humanity*, cited above in n. 12, pp. 187–212.

¹⁶ *NS*/338–40.

within the modifications of the mind of him who meditates it. For since this world of nations has certainly been made by men, it is within these modifications that its principles should have been sought.¹⁷

Clearly, Vico was well aware of the radical meanings and implications of his realistic, even naturalistic, conception of mythology. By insisting on the conceptual and historical primacy of the basic 'public needs or utilities of the peoples' in myths, he undermined the age-old traditions and entire theories of those 'acute individuals [who] applied their reflection to them.' He was particularly critical of two of his 'four major authors,' Plato and Bacon, who for him were, respectively, the first and the last great figures of the allegorical tradition.¹⁸

Plato opined that 'the myth is, as a whole, false' but admitted that 'there is truth in it too,' a truth pertaining to certain ultimate questions of life and death, the origins and ends of nations, fate and character, and similar metaphysical dilemmas.¹⁹ He therefore went on to interpret—and invent—myths as 'golden lies,' namely, as stories which were, and could still be, so designed as to transmit certain difficult but necessary 'truths' in educational and political programs.²⁰ Vico denied such metaphysical meanings or interpretations to mythology: its

poetic wisdom, the first wisdom of the gentile world, must have begun with metaphysics not rational and abstract like that of learned men now, but felt and imagined as that of these first men must have been, who, without power of ratiocination, were all robust sense and vigorous imagination. This metaphysics was their poetry, a faculty born . . . of their ignorance of causes, for ignorance, the mother of wonder, made everything wonderful to men who were ignorant of everything.²¹

[On Platonic attitudes toward imaginative language and the metaphysics of Neoplatonic interpreters, see chapters 2 (i, vii), 3, and 10. —ed.]

¹⁷ *NS*/374.

¹⁸ For a full elaboration of this matter see *Rehabilitation of Myth*, pp. 136–73. On Vico's notion and usage of allegory see Angus Fletcher, 'On the Syncretic Allegory of the *New Science*,' *New Vico Studies*, 4 (1986), 25–43.

¹⁹ Plato, *The Republic* 377a.

²⁰ See Ludwig Edelstein, 'The Function of Myth in Plato's Philosophy,' *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 10 (1949), 463–81. For a critical judgment see Marcel Detienne, *The Creation of Mythology*, trans. M. Cook (Chicago, 1986), p. 82.

²¹ *NS*/375.

As for Bacon, Vico was deeply impressed by his book on *The Wisdom of the Ancients*, and tried to emulate it in his own work on *The Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*; alas, he ultimately found Bacon's work 'more ingenious and learned than true.'²² This was particularly because Bacon presumed to have rediscovered in ancient mythology the modern methodology of the scientific revolution and many of its discoveries. He claimed that 'beneath no small number of these fables of the ancient poets there lay from the very beginning a mystery and allegory.' In 'some of these fables,' he continued, 'as well as in the very frame and texture of the story as in the propriety of the names . . . I find a conformity and connexion with the thing signified, so close and so evident, that one cannot help believing such signification to have been designed and meditated from the first, and purposely shadowed out.'²³ On the whole, Vico simply dismissed this kind of reasoning as 'conceit of the scholars, who will have it that what they know is as old as the world.'²⁴ He believed that

as much as the poets had first sensed in the way of vulgar wisdom, the philosophers later understood in the way of esoteric wisdom; so that the former may be said to have been the sense and the latter the intellect of the human race. What Aristotle said of the individual man is therefore true of the race in general: *Nihil est in intellectu quin prius fuerit in sensu*. That is, the human mind does not understand anything of which it has had no previous impression . . .²⁵

[On the changing configuration of the 'sense/intellect' distinction in Vico's interpretive program, see chapter 12 (v). —ed.]

As to Bacon's notion that the classical myths were just inventions or tricks of cunning authors who sought to disguise their truths from the ignorant masses, and should therefore be read as ironical texts—Vico ruled it out, and therewith the whole form of allegory implied by that notion, on historical and psychological grounds:

Irony certainly could not have begun until the period of reflection, because it is fashioned of falsehood by dint of a reflection which wears the mask of truth. Here emerges a great principle of human institutions, confirming the origin of poetry disclosed in this work: that since

²² *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, N.Y., 1963), pp. 148, 153.

²³ Francis Bacon, *On the Wisdom of the Ancients*, in *The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. J. Spedding, R.L. Ellis, and D.D. Heath (London, 1858–74), Vol. VI, p. 696.

²⁴ *NS*/127.

²⁵ *NS*/363.

the first men of the gentile world had the simplicity of children, who are truthful by nature, the first fables could not feign anything false; they must therefore have been . . . true narrations.²⁶

According to Vico, then, Bacon imputed too much and the wrong kind of 'wisdom' to the ancients. He could thus maintain that his own 'discovery of the origins of poetry does away with the opinion of the matchless wisdom of the ancients, so ardently sought after from Plato to Bacon's *De sapientia veterum*. For the wisdom of the ancients was the vulgar wisdom of the lawgivers who founded the human race, not the esoteric wisdom of great and rare philosophers.'²⁷

More generally still, Vico thought that both Plato and Bacon failed to discover the truth of myth because they looked for it through and behind its figurative language, not in that language itself. For Vico, in contrast, all myths were creations in and of this language. This was, on his own testimony, his greatest discovery, 'the master key' of his Science:

We find that the principle of these origins both of languages and of letters lies in the fact that the first gentile peoples, by a demonstrated necessity of nature, were poets who spoke in poetic characters. This discovery, which is the master key of this Science, has cost us the persistent research of almost all our literary life, because with our civilized natures we [moderns] cannot at all imagine and can understand only by great toil the poetic nature of these first men. The [poetic] characters of which we speak were certain imaginative genera (images for the most part of animate substances, of gods or heroes, formed by their imagination) to which they reduced all the species or all the particulars appertaining to each genus These divine or heroic characters were true fables or myths, and their allegories are found to contain meanings not analogical but univocal, not philosophical but historical, of the peoples of Greece of those times.²⁸

Let me make three brief comments on this key passage. First of all, and most generally, Vico's 'discovery' is akin to what modern theorists of culture have eventually come to proclaim as their own discovery, namely—to use Wittgenstein's words—that 'a whole mythology is deposited in our language.'²⁹ Moreover, this discovery has also

²⁶ NS/408.

²⁷ NS/384.

²⁸ NS/34. On the epistemic meaning and functions of Vico's theory of 'imaginative universals' see Donald P. Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981).

²⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, ed. R. Rhees, trans. A.C. Miles (Retford, 1979), p. 10.

inspired some modern artists, most notably James Joyce, to go (as Joyce put it) 'round and round to where terms begin': back to myth.³⁰ On a more fundamental level, this discovery suggests that Vico, like many modern interpretive social theorists, could establish his *New Science* only after he had taken a linguistic turn. He saw that inasmuch as the world in which we live is a world of institutions based on language, the task of the human sciences most resembles, and must be modelled on, the interpretation of texts. His concrete New Science was from one perspective 'philology'—an old art which traditionally entailed the formal interpretation of words in classical books, but which Vico transformed into a new science of understanding human beings in past or foreign cultures through their symbolic figures and myths. [On the role of 'philology' in earlier interpretation, see chapters 2 (i, vii), 3, 10, 12 (ii), and 14. —ed.]

Secondly, Vico's original conception of 'poetic characters,' his explanation of the epistemic and linguistic potentialities which render them 'imaginative universals,' and, above all, his attention to the operation of these and other rhetorical forms in the construction of social and historical reality—are all novel and important contributions to modern cultural sciences. He maintained, long before the formalists and structuralists of our times, that the forms of signification in the various languages are commensurable because they all pertain to the same human predicament, which has produced the same basic emotional reactions and prudential—or, in Vico's terminology, 'common-sensible'—lessons. 'Human choice, by its nature most uncertain, is made certain and determined by the common sense of men with respect to human needs or utilities, which are the two sources of the natural law of the gentes. Common sense is judgment without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation, or the entire human race.'³¹ On these premises, the mythologies are different, yet equivalent, linguistic expressions of the same 'judgment without reflection' on social life and history, and thus make up, and might be compared and analyzed by, what Vico called a 'mental dictionary':

³⁰ James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York, 1939), p. 452. See my 'Mythology and Counter-History: The New Critical Arts of Vico and Joyce,' in *Vico and Joyce*, ed. D.P. Verene (New York, 1987), pp. 32–47.

³¹ *NS*/141–2.

There must in the nature of human institutions be a mental language common to all nations, which uniformly grasps the substance of things feasible in human social life and expresses it with as many diverse modifications as these same things may have diverse aspects. A proof of this is afforded by proverbs or maxims of vulgar wisdom, in which substantially the same meanings find as many diverse expressions as there are nations ancient and modern.³²

Thirdly, Vico used his linguistic discoveries and theories to explore specific historical texts and cases, such as Roman law, which was, in his peculiar interpretation, a kind of 'severe poetry.'³³ His so-called 'Discovery of the True Homer,' though virtually unknown in his lifetime, remains radical even today. He boldly argued that the Homeric epic belonged to an heroic yet utterly primitive phase in Greek history; that its heroes, like Achilles, were only 'poetic characters' who reflected the moral and social norms of the Greek peoples; and ultimately, that Homer himself was not a real person, let alone the singular author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but rather that 'the Greek peoples were themselves Homer. . . . [O]ur Homer truly lived on the lips and in the memories of the peoples of Greece throughout the whole period from the Trojan War down to the time of Numa, a span of 460 years.'³⁴

I trust that these insightful notions make it clear why, indeed, Vico was 'the true discoverer of myth.' But, as I argued at the beginning of this essay, his prime aim in his investigation of mythology was to find therein the 'principles of humanity.' How, then, did mythology, the 'first science' of the *New Science*, help Vico to establish its principles, and what are they?

It should be recalled that Vico sought to discover those principles 'by a severe analysis of human thoughts about the human necessities or utilities of social life,' such as might be shown to inhere in those 'human institutions' which have proven crucial for 'the preservation of the human race.'³⁵ Here is his conclusion:

Now since this world of nations has been made by men, let us see in what institutions all men agree and always have agreed. For these institutions will be able to give us the universal and eternal principles (such as every science must have) on which all nations were founded and

³² *NS*/161.

³³ *NS*/1037.

³⁴ *NS*/875–6. For more on this subject see *Rehabilitation of Myth*, pp. 189–99.

³⁵ *NS*/347.

still preserve themselves. We observe that all nations, barbarous as well as civilized, though separately founded because remote from each other in time and space, keep these three human customs: all have some religion, all contract solemn marriages, all bury their dead. And in no nation, however savage and crude, are any human actions performed with more elaborate ceremonies and more sacred solemnity than the rites of religion, marriage, and burial. For, by the axiom that 'uniform ideas, born among peoples unknown to each other, must have a common ground of truth,' it must have been dictated to all nations that from these three institutions humanity began among them all . . . so that the world should not again become a bestial wilderness . . . [T]hese must be the bounds of human reason. And let him who would transgress them beware lest he transgress all humanity.³⁶

Now, the validity of Vico's concrete 'principles' may be—and has been—contested on logical, moral, and empirical grounds. But this is not the issue here. What is really novel and important in Vico's notion of the 'principles of humanity' is the hermeneutical, not the empirical, claim, namely his assertion that any cross-cultural understanding, to be possible at all, must assume and pursue certain absolute norms, or—to use a modern phrase—'limiting notions' of morality, which determine the range within which various forms of life can be exercised and be recognized as human.³⁷ [On some of the implications of such hermeneutical views in later interpretation, see chapter 1. —ed.] Further on Vico makes clear that he opted for these three 'civil institutions' because they are, or rather have become, 'natural customs' among all the peoples.³⁸ In this oxymoron he suggests that the appearance of certain rule-governed routines, which are manifestly morally principled, coincides with the moment in which mankind no longer obeys its natural instincts but rather submits itself to its own rules—an act that enables these rules to be followed at all by us. This, however, is feasible only insofar as we can relate the rule-governed or 'principled' behaviour of other peoples to our own experience, however different that may be. Thus, for example, in order to understand an alien religious belief or rite we must have some kind of religious experience or knowledge. This, then, is Vico's contention: since the world in which people live is a world of cultural meaning which they themselves have created, in

³⁶ *NS*/332–3, 360.

³⁷ Peter Winch, 'Understanding a Primitive Society,' *The American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1 (1964), 322.

³⁸ On 'natural customs' see James C. Morrison, 'Vico's Doctrine of the Natural Law of the Gentes,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 16 (1978), 47–60.

order to understand it we must grasp this meaning for them and in ourselves. And the best, indeed the only, way to get this meaning properly is to attend closely to the mythological dimensions of rites which are, or at least can be, known to us from our own lives. Or, to quote Wittgenstein again, the myths have such forceful meanings for us because they pertain to something 'deep and sinister' in us.³⁹ This becomes clear when we note that the decisive proof that Vico offers for the peculiar status of religion, marriage, and burial as 'principles of humanity' is that they are, and have always been, 'performed with more elaborate ceremonies and more sacred solemnity' than any other 'human actions' in all known societies. From this perspective it can be argued that the demarcation of the human from the bestial, or of the cultural from the natural, in human life and history is not, and could never be, sufficiently grounded in or guaranteed by rational convictions. There may be no compelling reasons to perform these rites at all, other than those which human life and history have taught us: that without them no human society could possibly survive.⁴⁰ They must always be guarded by mythological images and tales which are continuously recalled in 'elaborate ceremonies' and 'sacred solemnity.'

As a philologist of 'earliest antiquity' Vico was particularly privileged—and obliged—to observe the various ways in which its poetic tradition still inspired the age of enlightenment. 'The poetic speech which our poetic logic has helped us to understand continued for a long time into the historical period, much as great and rapid rivers continue far into the sea, keeping sweet the water borne by the force of their flow.'⁴¹ At the same time, he well knew that he was living in a post-mythical age, and that his task in making sense of myth was much more complicated than that of the ancient writers, or even Dante, who still lived in an age which was considerably myth-oriented. As he duly acknowledged:

The fables in their origin were true and severe narrations, whence *mythos*, fable, was defined as *vera narratio*. But because they were originally for the most part gross, they gradually lost their individual meanings, were then altered, subsequently became improbable, after that obscure, then scandalous, and finally incredible.⁴²

³⁹ Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, cited above in n. 29, p. 7.

⁴⁰ NS/1106.

⁴¹ NS/412.

⁴² NS/814.

However, unlike the allegorists who sought to save the 'beautiful' forms of classical mythology by rationalistic (and therefore anachronistic) interpretations of their 'ugly' norms, Vico insisted on the original unity and efficacy of the aesthetical and the ethical in myth, for these were the very qualities which enabled it to fulfill its moral function in the process of civilization: the sublimation of desire. For Vico, and for the eighteenth century at large, such a moral test was still the most common criterion by which to evaluate myth (and any other work of art):

In such fashion the first men of the gentile nations, children of nascent mankind, created things according to their own ideas. But this creation was infinitely different from that of God. For God, in his purest intelligence, knows things, and, by knowing them, creates them; but they, in their robust ignorance, did it by virtue of a wholly corporeal imagination. And because it was quite corporeal, they did it with marvelous sublimity (*sublimità*); a sublimity such and so great that it excessively perturbed the very persons who by imagining did the creating, for which they were called 'poets,' which is Greek for 'creators.' Now this is the threefold labor of great poetry: (1) to invent sublime fables suited to the popular understanding; (2) to perturb to excess, with a view to the end proposed; (3) to teach the vulgar to act virtuously, as the poets have taught themselves⁴³

Following on these observations, Vico construed a distinctly 'narrativist' theory of human life and history, which is akin to what one of the leading moral and social theorists of our times, Alasdair MacIntyre, has claimed: that inasmuch as 'man is in his actions and practices, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal . . . a teller of stories that aspire to truth,' then we must perceive our lives (and those of others) according to certain narratives which lay out for us basic precedents, rules, and prescriptions for moral action in social situations.⁴⁴ According to MacIntyre, 'narrative history . . . is not the work of poets, dramatists and novelists reflecting upon the events which had no narrative order before one was imposed by the singer or the writer,' but rather a form of life in which 'stories are lived before they are told,' an 'enacted dra-

⁴³ NS/376. On the relation between this notion of 'sublimity' and the approach of pseudo-Longinus, see *Rehabilitation of Myth*, pp. 157–60.

⁴⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (London, 1985), p. 216.

matic narrative in which the characters are also the authors.' Hence, he concludes, 'there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things. Vico was right and so was Joyce.'⁴⁵ [On diverse forms of the argument that the construction of history is inseparable from the structure of narrative, see chapters 12 (vi–viii) and 18–20. —ed.]

Indeed Vico was right (as was Joyce in his interpretation of Vico). Assuming that human reality is permeated by its foundational myths to such an extent that it cannot be reduced by scientific-historical research to presumably more elemental explanations, he came to perceive the narratives and other symbolic interpretations of historical reality in which the people believe to be as real as the conditions and events in which they actually live. They are the 'true narrations' that not only the peoples but also their historians actually have, and their task, therefore, should be to illuminate, not to eliminate, these narratives, by showing their extension or configuration of historical reality:

Our Science therefore comes to describe at the same time an ideal eternal history traversed in time by the history of every nation in its rise, development, maturity, decline, and fall. Indeed, we make bold to affirm that he who meditates this Science narrates to himself this ideal eternal history so far as he himself makes it for himself by that proof 'it had, has, and will have to be.' For the first indubitable principle posited above is that this world of nations has certainly been made by men, and its guise must therefore be found within the modifications of our own human mind. And history cannot be more certain than when he who creates the things also narrates them.⁴⁶

Vico thus came to redefine myth as 'true narration' (*vera narratio*) of human life and history because he saw that in our (and any other) civilization the fictions of mythology illuminate the 'real world' by constituting or 'prefiguring' all its human actions and institutions. Unlike natural occurrences which display law-like, repetitive regularities which are unknowable to us because they are totally alien to our form of life, human occurrences throughout history display forms

⁴⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 208–16.

⁴⁶ *NS*/349.

of moral action which are knowable to us insofar as we can recognize in them the coherent narrative patterns of the mythical stories with their archetypal characters and plots.

Mythology thus fully deserved to be called the 'first science' of the *New Science*, because ultimately it was more than just the 'interpretation of fables'; it was really the explanation of history. Vico summed it up most poignantly:

Truth is sifted from falsehood in everything that has been preserved for us through long centuries by those vulgar traditions which, since they have been preserved for so long a time and by entire peoples, must have had a public ground of truth. The great fragments of antiquity, hitherto useless to science because they lay begrimed, broken, and scattered, shed great light when cleaned, pieced together, and restored.⁴⁷

[On the effort to reconstruct fragmentary forms of antiquity in Boccaccio's mythography, see chapters 12 (ii) and 14; on problems of historical recovery in later interpretation, see chapters 12 (vi–viii) and 18–20. —ed.] What is that truth? Presumably that which already Plato had referred to when he said that 'the myth is false, but there is truth in it also'—the truth about truth, that ultimately, all our moral and social theories are (or at least should be rendered) mythological: they grow out of and express 'the public grounds of truth' of specific historical communities and civilizations. 'The public grounds of truth': the English translation does not convey the exact meaning of the Italian original—*publici motivi del vero*. That expression indicates more clearly what Vico regards as the main force in the social construction of reality: the popular impressions and interpretations of reality which, being the essential lessons of the collective-historical experience, are continuously recorded, reassessed, reaffirmed and transmitted by the various 'vulgar traditions' in which we all believe—and live.

⁴⁷ *NS*/356–7.

**ALLEGORY AS THE TROPE OF MEMORY:
REGISTERS OF CULTURAL TIME IN SCHLEGEL
AND NOVALIS**

Azade Seyhan

The study of literary history illustrates that certain tropes and topoi respond with particular intensity to the revolutionary potential of times facing social, moral, and intellectual crises. The shattered political and metaphysical aspirations of an age that experienced the aftermath of the French Revolution inform the discourse of the *Frühromantik* (early German Romanticism).¹ Upheavals and ruptures caused by revolution, war, and enemy occupation often lead to an impoverishment of the cultural heritage of nations and peoples. This loss requires the work of public and collective memory to reclaim a past regarded as meaningful and morally intact that preceded the more recent loss of social and cultural 'wholeness.' German Romanticism's manifest response to the perceived erasure of cultural integrity in post-revolutionary and embattled Europe assumed the form of a highly intellectualized effort to rewrite intellectual history as a 'new mythology.' This implied a strategy of recovering lost, forgotten, and occluded forms of cultural and literary history and investing them with the verbal power of critical reflection and correction. Thus, the practice of literature and the construction of the figural assume responsibility for the preservation and propagation of a cultural memory that interprets the past not in terms of actual or lived experience but rather in terms of tropes and fables with redemptive potential. The favored tropes and forms in the service of the Romantic project were allegory, irony, and fragment, which resisted both rigid

¹ A literary movement that had its center in Jena and revolved around the collaborative journal *Athenäum*, published during 1798–1800 by the Schlegel brothers, August Wilhelm and Friedrich. Its members included August Wilhelm's wife Caroline, Schlegel's wife Dorothea, Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), Friedrich Schleiermacher, Ludwig Tieck, and F.W.J. Schelling.

systematization and ideology by enforcing a regime of self-reflexivity. [On earlier programs for the 'recovery' of mythology and the role of historical self-consciousness, see chapters 12 (ii, v), 14, and 17. —ed.]

In his essay, 'The Structure of Allegorical Desire,' Joel Fineman notes that 'allegory seems regularly to surface in critical or polemical atmospheres, when for political or metaphysical reasons there is something that cannot be said.'² He further argues that allegory is often 'directed to critical and polemical ends' and that 'the motive to allegorize emerges out of recuperative originology.'³ Allegory operates as a device to protect a past susceptible to the ravages of time, a past that would be irretrievably lost if not preserved in commentary and interpretation. The highly visible return and empowerment of allegory in modern literary theory after its relative marginalization at the expense of symbol, a demotion associated with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's expressed preference for the latter trope, requires a reinterpretation of the history of allegory in modernity. Here it may be useful to define the regulative task of the term as it is often understood in modern critical discourse. In *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (1979), Maureen Quilligan insists on a distinction between the terms allegory and allegoresis. She claims that historically allegory has made itself visible by a number of obvious signals such as personification and progressively conspicuous signification, whereas allegoresis is a critical procedure that ensures a reflected use of language for purposes of critical correction.⁴ The valorization of allegory in contemporary literary history is, in fact, a recuperation of what Quilligan calls allegoresis as an act of commentary rather than an attempt to restore allegory as a visual or metaphysical signal. It is in the sense of allegoresis that allegory is understood in this essay. [On the movement of 'allegory' into a central position in recent critical theory, see chapters 1, 12 (vii–viii), and 19–20. —ed.]

In his celebrated discussion of *figura*, Erich Auerbach compares and contrasts the allegorical with the symbolic in the framework of the origin and analysis of figural interpretation. Figural interpretation, which is intimately linked to the allegorical process, is a trans-

² Joel Fineman, 'The Structure of Allegorical Desire,' in *Allegory and Representation*, ed. Stephen J. Greenblatt (Baltimore, 1981), p. 28.

³ Fineman, 'The Structure of Allegorical Desire,' p. 29.

⁴ Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1979).

formational operation that can alter the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion in collective memory. Auerbach states that figural interpretation transformed the Old Testament from a delimited narrative on the specific history and laws of the people of Israel into a more accessible text enhanced by stories and figures of Christ and the Redemption. When 'Jewish history and national character' were deleted from textual memory, the Celtic and Germanic peoples could accept the Old Testament, since it was now seen as

a part of the universal religion of salvation and a necessary component of the equally magnificent and universal vision of history that was conveyed to them along with this religion. In its original form, as law book and history of so foreign and remote a nation, it would have been beyond their reach.⁵

[On figural interpretation and the development of different interpretive communities, see chapters 2 (iv) and 6. —ed.]

Figural interpretation links two people or events. The first of these signifies not only itself but also the second one, and the second one fulfills the first. The spiritual links between these two are not abstractions, for promise and fulfillment can only exist in historical (human) time. Auerbach's definition of figural interpretation is heavily invested in allegorical understanding. Although figural interpretation, where one thing represents the other, is allegorical in a broad sense, Auerbach claims that it differs from traditional allegorical forms 'by the historicity both of the sign and what it signifies.'⁶ These traditional allegorical forms frequently encountered in literary history are, according to Auerbach, embodiments of abstract or immaterial entities that stand for virtues, passions, institutions, and a general synthesis of historical events. In other words, these traditional manifestations of allegory are what Quilligan is careful to distinguish from allegoresis, which includes in part the kind of figural interpretation discussed by Auerbach. In comparing further the symbol and the *figura*, Auerbach states that although both the symbol (as well as symbolic forms) and the *figura* (figural interpretation or prophecy) point to the desire to interpret and order life, the

⁵ Erich Auerbach, "Figura," trans. Ralph Manheim (from the text published in *Neue Dantestudien* [Istanbul, 1944], pp. 11–71) in Auerbach's *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (New York, 1959), pp. 11–76; p. 52.

⁶ Auerbach, "Figura," p. 54.

symbol must possess magic power, not the *figura*; the *figura*, on the other hand, must always be historical, but not the symbol. . . . What actually makes the two forms completely different is that figural prophecy relates to an interpretation of history—indeed it is by nature a textual interpretation—while the symbol is a direct interpretation of life and originally no doubt for the most part, of nature. Thus figural interpretation is a product of late cultures, far more indirect, complex, and charged with history than the symbol or myth.⁷

Auerbach endows figural interpretation, characterized here by a strong allegorical impulse, with cultural and intellectual maturity and the benefit of historical experience. This critical observation is closely allied to early Romantic reinterpretations of the form and function of allegory as a regulative metaphor of the 'new mythology.'

The comparative and competitive juxtaposition of symbol and allegory in German Romanticism is initiated in Goethe's writing. This highly cited dichotomy invests the symbol with motivation and generative representation, whereas its oppositional term allegory is burdened with predetermined as well as arbitrary meaning. Symbol carries the mark of a signifying system, and allegory is limited by its adherence to fixed concepts. In a final maxim on the symbol/allegory opposition that he had developed in 'On the Objects of the Plastic Arts' (*Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst*) and other writings, Goethe states that allegory transforms the phenomenon into a concept and the concept into an image, but in such a way that the concept remains always expressible in the image. The symbol, on the other hand, translates the phenomenon into an idea and the idea into an image, in which the idea is neither transparent nor fixed but continues to be generative and open to reconfiguration.⁸ The opposition operates in terms of transparency versus opacity or inaccessibility, and established meaning versus generative signifieds. Modern critics have expressed doubts about the definitional boundaries of the two tropes and have asked whether the dichotomy itself is arbitrary. The question remains whether it was the inadequacy of Goethe's own critical vocabulary or partial interpretations of his statements that resulted in this judgement on the functions of the two tropes as oppositional rather than complementary.⁹ [On the 'alle-

⁷ Auerbach, "Figura," p. 57.

⁸ See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maximen*, no. 1113, in *Gedenkausgabe der Werke*, ed. Ernst Beutler (Zürich, 1949), p. 693.

gory' / 'symbol' distinction and some of its problems, see chapters 1 (ii), 12 (i, vi–viii), 13, 19, and 20. —ed.]

In early Romanticism, allegory is often synonymous with material representation (*Darstellung*). Nevertheless, there is neither a systematic nor a consistent demarcation between the fields of operation of symbol and allegory. For example, in a long fragment Novalis describes symbol as a unit in an open-ended signifying system:

Each symbol can be symbolized anew by what it symbolized On the confusion of the *symbol* with the symbolized—on their identification—on the belief in a true and complete representation—on the relation of the picture and the original—of appearance and substance—on conclusions drawn from outward similarity—on universally valid agreements and coherences—in short, on the confusion of subject and object rest all the superstitions and mistakes of all times, peoples, and individuals

(Everything can be symbol of something else—symbolic function.)

(Jedes Symbol kann durch sein Symbolisirtes wieder Symbolisirt werden Auf Verwechslung des *Symbols* mit dem Symbolirten—auf ihre Identisirung—auf den Glauben an wahrhafte, vollständige Repraesentation—und Relation des Bildes und des Originals—der Erscheinung und der Substanz—auf der Folgerung von äußerer Aehnlichkeit—auf durchgängige innre Übereinstimmung und Zusammenhang—kurz auf Verwechslungen von Subject und Object beruht der ganze Aberglaube und Irrthum aller Zeiten, und Völker und Individuen

[Alles kann Symbol der Andern seyn—Symbolische Function.])¹⁰

Here Novalis, very much in the spirit of Goethe, sees in the domain of symbol a generative field of meaning and a progressive movement of signification. Novalis's fragment, furthermore, suggests that the symbol needs to be read literally as well as interpretively and critically. It is interesting to note that Angus Fletcher in his very comprehensive and erudite study of allegory calls attention to the resonance of the literal sense in the operation of allegory.

The whole point of allegory is that it does not *need* to be read exegetically; it often has a literal level that makes good enough sense all by itself. But somehow this literal surface suggests a peculiar doubleness

⁹ See, for example, Hazard Adams, *Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic* (Tallahassee, Fla., 1983), pp. 53–58, and Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, orig. pub. in 1977 as *Théories du symbole*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982), pp. 205–07.

¹⁰ Novalis, 'Das Allgemeine Brouillon,' in *Schriften*, ed. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel (Stuttgart, 1960), III, 397–98, no. 685.

of intention, and while it can, as it were, get along without interpretation, it becomes much richer and more interesting if given interpretation. Even the most deliberate fables, if read naïvely or carelessly, may seem mere stories, but what counts in our discussion is a structure that lends itself to a secondary reading, or rather, one that becomes stronger when given a secondary meaning as well as a primary meaning.¹¹

This disjunction of meanings and the noncoincidence of the signifier and the signified are categories usually associated with allegory in the many fragments and essays of the journal central to early German Romanticism, the *Athenäum*.

Earlier Friedrich Schiller had reinterpreted Kantian notions of the beautiful and the sublime in a way that aligned the sublime with certain features evocative of the allegorical. Goethe and Schiller, the two great contemporaries of German poetry, saw each other in mirrors of alterity but also in harmonious complementarity. Schiller, so the comparison goes, is the poet of the conceptual, Goethe of the intuitive; in Schiller's own view, Goethe is the master of 'naïve,' Schiller that of 'sentimental' poetry. Like Heinrich Heine and Friedrich Nietzsche after him, Goethe was critical of the abstruseness of German philosophy. He saw the dead weight of language residing in abstractions, essentialist categories, and predetermined meanings. Therein lies his unwillingness to endorse the conceptually governed sign embedded in allegory. Schiller, on the other hand, locates in the experience of the sublime an allegorical tendency characterized by the separation of the conceptual from the sensuous or material being.

In his essay, 'On the Sublime' ('Über das Erhabene'), Schiller explores the implications of the Kantian analytic of the beautiful and the sublime. He argues that in the beautiful, reason and sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) are in harmony and that this coincidence of the two is attractive to us. The beautiful alone, however, cannot ensure the cognizance of our intellectual capacity. But the noncoincidence of reason and the sensible, 'the disjunction of faculties' in the sublime, entices our soul (*Gemüt*). It is this irreducible gap between the conceptual and the sensuous that separates the moral man from the physical; for whereas the first reaches a sublime transcendence in this duality, the second is cramped by the physical limits of his being. This separation of reason from sensuous experience, concept from sensibility, allows moral man access into the experience of the sub-

¹¹ Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, N.Y.), p. 7.

lime.¹² The awareness of alterity that defines the sublime state coincides, in turn, with an orientation regularly regarded as allegorical. Here Schiller paves the way to Romanticism's fascination with the critically transformative power of allegory, an attitude that suggests at times that general view in which allegory 'acquires the status of trope of tropes, representative of the figurality of all language, of the distance between signifier and signified, and, correlatively, the response to allegory becomes representative of critical activity *per se*.'¹³

Friedrich Schlegel reverses Goethe's critical judgment, when he writes that 'all beauty is allegory. The highest [or the most sublime], precisely because it is unsayable, can only be said allegorically' ('alle Schönheit ist Allegorie. Das Höchste kann man eben weil es unaussprechlich ist, nur allegorisch sagen').¹⁴ Novalis, likewise, states that '[a]t the most, the imitation of nature, of truth can only be carried out allegorically'¹⁵ and that true poetry 'can only have an allegorical meaning in general.'¹⁶ Thus allegory becomes the expression of the inexpressible, the trope of the sublime, and the vehicle of true poetry. This status fully contradicts Goethe's definition, for now it is in allegory rather than in the symbol that the idea remains inaccessible, inexpressible, and infinitely productive. Allegory becomes the intersection of the finite with the infinite, and each work of art in its allegorical character intimates the infinite.

It should be stressed that these definitions of allegory are not systematically formulated. The problem of definition inheres in the expanding semantic domain of allegory in the course of critical history, including the implication of the term with approaches to history at large. Fletcher sees allegory as 'a many-sided phenomenon.'¹⁷ Jon Whitman observes that both *allegory* and *symbol* '... not only vary in definition over time; in the course of their development, they expose varying attitudes toward time itself.'¹⁸ A Romantic critic who was not associated with the Jena Circle, Friedrich Creuzer, proceeded

¹² Friedrich Schiller, 'Über das Erhabene,' in *Theoretische Schriften*, ed. Gerhart Fricke (Munich, 1966), pp. 207–21; p. 212.

¹³ Fineman, 'The Structure of Allegorical Desire,' cited above in n. 2, p. 27.

¹⁴ Friedrich Schlegel, 'Das Gespräch über die Poesie,' in *Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler, with Jean-Jacques Anstett and Hans Eichner (Paderborn, 1958–), II, 324.

¹⁵ Novalis, *Schriften*, cited above in n. 10, IV, 327.

¹⁶ Novalis, *Schriften*, III, 572, no. 113.

¹⁷ Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, cited above in n. 11, p. 23.

¹⁸ Jon Whitman, 'From the Textual to the Temporal: Early Christian "Allegory" and Early Romantic "Symbol,"' *New Literary History*, 22 (1991), 161–76; 161.

somewhat more systematically than Schlegel and Novalis in his formulation of the separate destinies of symbol and allegory by linking these tropes to different configurations of temporality. Later Walter Benjamin used Creuzer's insights to locate stations of historical time in allegory. It is in the textual and visual fragments of allegory, Benjamin argued, that the conceptual and moral paradigms of particular epochs reside. [On relations between allegory and temporality, see chapters 2 (iv), 6, 12 (ii, v–viii), 17, 19, and 20. —ed.]

To be sure, the critical legacy of early Romanticism in the work of Schlegel and Novalis is available to us only in the structure of allegory—or dream or memory—itself, that is, as fragments in a series of occulted origins and postponed ends. In turn, any performance of the allegorical in Romanticism is reflected, to use Schlegel's famous metaphor, 'in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln' (in an endless series of mirrors)¹⁹ as the theory of allegory. This translates in the Romantic lexicon into an allegory of allegory. From such a perspective, the theory of allegory, of irony, and of the Romantic novel can only be written as allegory, irony, and a novel. Ultimately, an understanding of tropes and forms in Romantic discourse resists all systematic analysis and can only be poetically represented. Nevertheless, Creuzer, Benjamin, and finally, Paul de Man transformed Romantic critical fragments into more theoretically informed views by linking allegory to time, history, and memory in a generative fashion.

In *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (*Origin of German Tragic Drama*), Benjamin notes that Friedrich Creuzer's introduction of dichotomous structures of temporality into the comparative analysis of allegory and symbol reconceptualizes the formal separation of the two tropes.²⁰ Benjamin maintains that both symbol and allegory are, in essence, representations of time. Whereas symbol transforms the ruptures of time into a kind of ephemerally transcendent image, allegory crystallizes the imagistic memory of history at the time of this rupture. Allegory becomes an archive or collection of the shocked visages and crises of history. Benjamin's interest in allegory focuses not only on the literary history of the trope in the baroque and eighteenth century but also on its shifting critical functions in modernity. Allegory is a trope of border crossings, a regulative metaphor for those epochs

¹⁹ Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe*, cited above in n. 14, II, 182, no. 116.

²⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels*, orig. pub. 1928, ed. in Vol. I of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main, 1974).

when events and ideas are transformed—guided or jolted—into another time and form, as in the moment of the awakening of an age from a dream. Allegory operates in the critical interstices and contiguities between epochs, paradigms, and forms. It mediates between the secular and the profane, baroque and modernity, history and memory, and image and script. It is the site of translation between these terms. [On Benjamin's approach to allegory, see chapters 12 (vii) and 19. —ed.]

Indeed, in Romanticism, allegory becomes a mediating term between the present and an elusive past and marks the incommensurability of human time and of infinite transitoriness. But this raises several questions about the nature of allegory's relation to temporality. How does temporality enter the structure of allegory? How, in turn, does the figure shape temporality? Where does allegory start? Reflection on the nature of time leads to a series of metaphysical questions—including how we identify the present and what the passage of time is—that seem deceptively simple but remain stubbornly unanswerable. The problems are not mere consequences of the failure of language, for they are rooted in our experience of time. It seems that time is the condition of all representation but is itself unrepresentable. And allegory is the trope *par excellence* of unrepresentability. The relation of time to allegory is negotiated by the introduction of what seems to be a necessary third term—memory. While allegory represents unrepresentability, memory represents the unrepresentability of time. Whatever may be entailed in this irreducible unrepresentability, such as Romanticism's anxiety of cultural loss, at what point does allegory become the necessary marker of the experience of temporality, of the passage of cultural time? In his Jena lectures of 1799–1801 on *Transzendentalphilosophie*, Schlegel attempts to provide a partial answer by marking the aesthetic moment of the inception of knowledge as the birth of allegory:

Why has the infinite come out of itself and made itself finite?—In other words, why are there particulars? Or: why doesn't the play of nature end in an instant, so that nothing exists? This question can only be answered if we introduce a concept. We have the concepts of endless substance—and particulars. When we want to explain the transition from one to the other, we cannot do this by any other means than by inserting another concept between the two, namely, that of picture or representation, allegory (eikōn [likeness, image]). Thus, the individual [or the particular] is a picture of an endless substance.

(One could also express this: God created the world in order to represent himself.)

(*Warum ist das Unendliche aus sich herausgegangen und hat sich endlich gemacht?*—das heißt mit andren Worten: *Warum sind Individua?* Oder: *Warum läuft das Spiel der Natur nicht in einem Nu ab, so daß also gar nichts existirt?* Die Antwort auf diese Frage ist nur möglich, wenn wir einen Begriff einschieben. Wir haben nämlich die Begriffe *eine, unendliche Substanz*—und *Individua*. Wenn wir uns den Übergang von dem einen zu den andern erklären wollen, so können wir dies nicht anders, als daß wir zwischen beyden noch einen Begriff einschieben, nämlich den Begriff *des Bildes* oder *Darstellung, Allegorie (eikōn)*. Das Individuum ist also *ein Bild der einen unendlichen Substanz*.

[Man könnte dies auch ausdrücken: Gott hat die Welt hervorgebracht, um sich selbst darzustellen.])²¹

Thus, allegory marks the transition between chaos and form. But it does not mark an origin or an end, because it is the infinitely repeatable moment of creating form. Without allegory as aide-mémoire (and as an interpretive instrument), the past is at risk; human achievement cannot emerge from the chaos of unmarked time and space.

In its classical definition, allegory is an extended metaphor. The Romantic imagination understands this notion of extension not only in terms of time but also in terms of space, that is, not only as a metaphysics of temporality but also as a corporeal entity. Both Schlegel and, more forcefully, Novalis emphasize the spatiotemporal being of allegory as *Darstellung*. In contrast to other words that signify representation such as *Vorstellung* (mental representation or imagination) and *Repraesentation* (the philosophical problem of representation), *Darstellung* stands for material representation, be it voice, picture, icon, sculpture, or text. In Romanticism, allegory becomes the temporal, spatial, and material form of the inexpressible, the absolute, the sublime. It represents an absence that can never be present as itself, as identity. Novalis refers to representation as a 'Gegenwärtigmachen – des Nicht Gegenwärtigen' (making present the no longer present).²² In other words, it is re-presentation. If allegory is purely signifying, solely representation, as Schlegel often claims, it exists for the sake of an absence it represents. In this sense, it becomes the trope of memory as re-presentation—bringing an irrevocably lost moment to bear upon the present.

²¹ Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe*, cited above in n. 14, XII, 39.

²² Novalis, 'Das Allgemeine Brouillon,' in *Schriften*, cited above in n. 10, III, 421, no. 782.

In Romanticism, both irony and allegory point to a lacuna that marks the uncertainty about absolute presence. This absence can only be recovered temporally as poetic representation. The aesthetic construct is the temporalization of the absolute. For 'all their profound distinctions in mood and structure,' Paul de Man sees both tropes as 'two faces of the same fundamental experience of time.'²³ They are 'linked in their common discovery of a truly temporal predicament,'²⁴ for being detached from their origins and ends, they can only signify indirectly by substitution, replacement, and association. [On the problem of temporality, 'material' representation, and de Man's approach, see chapters 12 (viii) and 20. —ed.] However, the fact that Romanticism designates form (literary and aesthetic) as the locus of the philosophical idea raises the issue of how different tropes may signify different modes of generating knowledge. From a Romantic perspective, the dialectic of creation and dissolution characteristic of irony could be seen as an ideal mode of understanding the passage of history and time. Irony needs a sustained narrative to choreograph its moves in time; it needs to play out its destiny in progressive narrative. Ironic texts of the Romantics, such as Achim von Arnim's *Isabella von Ägypten* (*Isabella of Egypt*) or Heinrich von Kleist's *Der Zweikampf* (*The Duel*), are often based on historical events recorded in partially factual accounts, but they contest and question the facticity of such events and expose the uncertainties of historical memory by the use of various narrative framing devices and multiple endings. In this way, they raise the ambiguities of human stories and histories to a self-reflexive level where they can be lived with effectively. Allegory, on the other hand, travels through discontinuous stations of time. Because of its corporeality and its positioning between the textual and the visual, it can capture memory in its prototypical sense as image, as eidetic recollection. It can also arrest it as text. Allegory conceals a temporal loss that can only be redeemed as simulated past. As a text, allegory is a palimpsest of memories that reshape traces of the past, of the contexts that shape cultural history, and of the stresses and crises to which history is subjected.

²³ Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality,' orig. pub. 1969, rpt. in de Man's *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, 1983), pp. 187–228; p. 226.

²⁴ De Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality,' p. 222.

Allegorical narrative, therefore, can only be fragmentary; it can make no claims to a revelation of an underlying historical reality as presence in the Hegelian sense. It tells its story with the help of memory and the poetic vision of anticipation.

The protocols of this poetic historiography are best described in Novalis's novel fragment, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*:

The true sense for the stories of mankind develops late and more under the calm influence of memory than under the more violent impressions of the present. The most recent events appear only loosely connected, but they sympathize all the more wonderfully with the more remote ones; and only when one is able to review a long series [of events] and avoid both taking everything literally and confusing the actual order [of events] with capricious dreams, does one notice the secret interlinkage of the past and the future and learn how to construct history from hope and memory.

(Der eigentliche Sinn für die Geschichten der Menschen entwickelt sich erst spät, und mehr unter den stillen Einflüssen der Erinnerung, als unter den gewaltsameren Eindrücken der Gegenwart. Die nächsten Ereignisse scheinen nur locker verknüpft, aber sie sympathisieren desto wunderbarer mit den entfernteren; und nur dann, wenn man imstande ist, eine lange Reihe zu übersehn und weder alles buchstäblich zu nehmen, noch auch mit mutwilligen Träumen die eigentliche Ordnung zu verwirren, bemerkt man die geheime Verkettung des Ehemaligen und Künftigen, und lernt die Geschichte aus Hoffnung und Erinnerung zusammensetzen.)²⁵

Memory as portrayed in such a passage has a counterpart in the simultaneity of erasures and constructions in allegory. Allegory is in effect a memory that functions diachronically as well as synchronically. It dislocates fragments of lived experience from their historical habitat or habitual context and re-members them in language. Thus, the narrative of memory is transformed into material signs. This memory resists all nostalgia of origins, because it wants to remember not as a slave to the past but as a critically astute interpreter of the past aware of the 'advantage and disadvantage of history for life,' to use the title of Friedrich Nietzsche's probing essay. Ultimately, in the critical practice of early Romanticism, irony emerges as the trope of history and allegory as the trope of memory.

In the final analysis, the theory and practice of allegory is based in a culture's attitude to the competing languages and discourses of

²⁵ Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1963), p. 143.

its age. I have argued elsewhere that in Romantic thought, allegory and representation, as critical terms in a new poetic epistemology, constituted paradigmatic models for understanding temporality and alterity.²⁶ In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye sees all criticism as a form of allegorizing, for reading and interpretation are acts of appropriation, making one's own, and rewriting.²⁷ Whether or not such a view of the relation between allegory and criticism is accepted, memory has its own way of appropriating history and rewriting it to release its potential of *Bildung*. [On the question of Frye's view, see chapter 1 (iii). —ed.] Memory shapes and reinvents experience in poetry to correct the mistakes of the past. It is an act of construction initiated and reinforced by cultural positions, pedagogical imperatives, and a dialectic of unity and fragmentation. It claims allegory as its regulative trope, for allegory insists on the elusiveness of representation and rejects the stability of the image by displaying its fragmentation in social time. Furthermore, it proceeds by analysis and synthesis in an ongoing dialectic that resists closure. In this way, it destroys the consolation offered by the simultaneity of the symbol. In 'Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne' ('On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense'), Nietzsche makes the claim that human beings can live with some degree of peace by forgetting the symbolic construction of reality. In other words, they can come to terms with the enormous uncertainty about truth only as long as they are unable to remember that all our laws about nature were imposed on it in the form of metaphor, analogy, and heuristic fiction.²⁸ But allegory always remembers its coming into being as an anthropomorphist desire.

With the passage of time, the past becomes increasingly unattainable. Its reconstruction in historiography and memory is, as Benjamin sees it, a posthumous event. In 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte' ('Theses on the Philosophy of History'), Benjamin conceives of the fragments of remembered time as allegories which were crystallized in moments of history's shocks. It is memory that recalls emancipatory moments from the continuum of history to confront

²⁶ See Azade Seyhan, *Representation and Its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism* (Berkeley, 1992).

²⁷ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957; rpt. Princeton, 1971), p. 89.

²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Über Wahrheit und Lüge im Außermoralischen Sinne,' in *Werke*, ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich, 1956).

the crises of the present. 'The true picture of the past *flits* by,' writes Benjamin.

The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. . . . For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.

(Das wahre Bild der Vergangenheit *huscht* vorbei. Nur als Bild, das auf Nimmerwiederssehen im Augenblick seiner Erkennbarkeit eben aufblitzt, ist die Vergangenheit festzuhalten. . . . Denn es ist ein unwiederbringliches Bild der Vergangenheit, das mit jeder Gegenwart zu verschwinden droht, die sich nicht also in ihm gemeint erkannte.)²⁹

These fragmented allegorical images render the past linguistically and topically more accessible by revealing themselves as condensed archives. For Benjamin, memory is an intersection and an interdiction. It is not about telling events as they really happened or ordering them in a chronological sequence 'wie einen Rosenkranz' (like the beads of a rosary).³⁰ Rather, it is a correlation of the constellations formed in the present time with those of the past. Salvaging revolutionary moments of history by appropriative memory also entails a ban on the unproblematic representation of the past.

Since memory, like allegory, is always re-membling, synthesizing from nonlinear moments, in certain respects it pursues questions in the manner of philosophy. This conceptualizing memory is simultaneously emancipatory, for it allows, in a Schillerian sense, moral freedom from constraints of an oppressed past. Fletcher sees such gestures of self-reflexivity as socially redeeming features of allegory. The 'satirical criticism and the apocalyptic escape into an infinite space and time' displayed in allegory serve 'major social and spiritual needs'³¹ in their role as the voice of social conscience. In this sense, allegory crosses the purely signifying and the aesthetic border to become an agent of social change.

²⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte,' in *Illuminationen* (Munich, 1977), p. 253. The English translation is from *Illuminations*, ed. with introd. by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (1968; rpt. New York, 1969), p. 255 (my italics).

³⁰ Benjamin, *Illuminationen*, p. 261; *Illuminations*, p. 263.

³¹ Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, cited above in n. 11, p. 23.

**CONSTRUCTIONS OF ALLEGORY / ALLEGORIES
OF CONSTRUCTION: RETHINKING HISTORY
THROUGH BENJAMIN AND FREUD**

Rainer Nägele

The insistent return of allegory in modernism after its vilification in the name of the symbol raises a recurrent question.* What is at stake in this return and reevaluation, in the remarkable position that allegory and theories of allegory occupy in modernity? [On this development regarding allegory, see chapters 1, 12 (vii–viii), 18, and 20.—ed.]

To address this question, I wish to discuss briefly some motifs in one of the seminal texts of the modern rethinking of allegory, Benjamin's book on the origin of the German *Trauerspiel* ('mourning-play'), and the transformation of allegory into the key figure of a new philosophy of history in Benjamin's later writings: the dialectical image. As a figure of history and memory, the dialectical image radically puts into question any notion of reconstruction. It posits instead the task of a construction that locates Benjamin's philosophy of history in a precise constellation with Freud's view of construction in analysis.

Before emerging as subject and object of major theoretical and critical inquiries in the twentieth century, allegory reasserts its place in many of the literary texts at the threshold of Modernism in the nineteenth century. In the writings of Heine and Baudelaire—to mention only two names in the construction of European Modernism—figures of allegory haunt the realm of art and beauty, accompanied by the ghosts and phantoms of past losses.

To speak of a return of allegory in modernity is to speak, most literally, of a *revenant* or a ghost and of the return of the repressed.

* This essay was first published in a slightly modified version under the title, 'The Laughing Tear: Constructions of Allegories in Modernism,' in *Glasgow Emblem Studies* 4 (1999).

The ghosts, phantoms, and specters that haunt the stages of Europe after *Hamlet* and permeate all literary genres in the eighteenth century are the spirits that greet the nascent Modernism of the nineteenth century, not only in the poetry of Heine and Baudelaire (where they abound), but also in the *Communist Manifesto*.¹ They infuse these texts with a specific 'affect.' In his response to Baudelaire's two poems 'Les sept vieillards' and 'Les petites vieilles,' Victor Hugo gave a name to this affect, calling it 'un frisson nouveau': a new shiver, a new shudder and thrill. It is an affect that is closely linked to the passion displayed in the historical rhetoric about allegory and to an anxiety that makes the body shiver.

It is worth exploring more closely the nature of this affect. But first it might be asked why I call it an 'affect' rather than a feeling or emotion. The word 'affect' has a somewhat archaic tone. Its use points back to a pre-psychological age in the seventeenth century, to its doctrines of humours and affects and their manipulation by rhetoric.

If this were only a nostalgic or antiquarian gesture, it would be of no use, or at best an idiosyncratic symptom. But there are two compelling reasons to insist on the term. First, it indicates a determinate negation of a certain tradition of psychologizing that is linked to a specific ideology of subjective interiority flourishing since the mid-eighteenth century and most threatened by the return of allegory. In contrast to a word like 'e-motion,' 'affect' does not suggest an expressive motion from an assumed interior to the outside. Instead, it puts the accent on an impact that might leave traces, traits, and perhaps wounds—remainders of something to be read.

Further, the use of the word suggests the sense of recourse and return to an earlier moment which marks all discourse of allegory (in the subjective and objective sense of the genitive) in Modernism, a sense, I would add, which is a constitutive element of Modernism itself, if a 'self' could be ascribed to such a construction. Yet one can also claim, as I have elsewhere,² that there is no return to an earlier historical period. This seemingly contradictory claim is a

¹ For a far-reaching reading and contemplation of these spectral figures see Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: L'État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris, 1993).

² R. Nägele, 'Augenblicke: Eingriffe. Brechts Ästhetik der Wahrnehmung,' in *The Other Brecht / Der andere Brecht. The Brecht Yearbook* 17 (Madison, Wisc., 1992), p. 30.

rephrasing of and commentary on one of Benjamin's notes in his work on the Parisian Arcades:

It is important for the materialist historian to differentiate most rigorously the construction of a historical state of affairs [*Sachverhalt*] from that which one usually calls its reconstruction. The reconstruction in the mode of empathy [*Einfühlung*] is one-dimensional. Construction presupposes destruction.³

Two assertions thus confront each other, and each claims to name a constitutive element in the construction of Modernism: on the one hand, the return to and of the past; on the other hand, the negation of any possibility of a reconstruction in the constructions of history and memory. To this one might add another possible contradiction. My insistence on the affective, passionate, anxiety-ridden quality of allegory and its effects seems to be at odds with my title's suggestion of allegory as a 'construction.' This latter contradiction has been noted many times before. The traditional descriptions of allegory oscillate between a depiction of its barren, dry, and cold qualities as a mere construction of conceptual reasoning and rationalization, and an emphasis on its irrational, dreamlike, and hallucinatory appearance. Benjamin articulates this antinomy as a 'conflict of a cold and ready-made technique with the eruptive expression of allegorization' (I, 351). [On some problems regarding the notion of 'abstraction' in interpretive allegory, see chapter 2 (v-viii). —ed.]

Indeed, antinomies and contradictions seem to be the stuff that allegories and discourses on allegory are made of. There is hardly a discussion of allegory that does not begin with a listing of antinomies. Allegory appears as the figure of antinomy, opposition, dualism, splitting, tearing apart—a figure of analytical reason, of *Verstand*, in contrast to the synthesizing, unifying power of the symbol. Such distinctions display the affective, passionate, pathetic, and anxiety-inducing effects of allegory: a pathos of cuts that entangles discourses of allegory with the foundational wounds and discontents of civilization.

It seems that any discussion of allegory is itself liable to be lost in a kind of allegorical forest of evocative but inconclusive paths, or perhaps some labyrinth hopelessly knotted with frazzled strings hanging out in all directions. The difficulty of unraveling the knots begins

³ W. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, gen. eds., 6 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1972–85), V, 587. All citations from Benjamin refer to this edition; the translations are mine.

with the inseparable entanglement of any discourse on allegory with its object. The problem involves not only the irreducible figurality of all language, but also, more specifically, the difficulty of a presentation that aims to link intricate historical phenomena with systematic questions. A presentation that attempts to give a narrative account of the specific historical phenomenon of the 'return of allegory' in Modernism at large and in Benjamin's writings in particular, and at the same time a systematic account of the structure and figure of modern allegory, finds itself in the same temporal and structural dilemma that Paul de Man ascribes to allegory: 'Allegory is sequential and narrative, yet the topic of its narration is not necessarily temporal at all'⁴ The difficulty is further complicated by the fact that the return of allegory at a particular historical moment, and specifically in Benjamin's writing, is at the same time the indicator of a radical change in the concept of history and memory itself. As my discussion later suggests, that change involves a different kind of remembering through the dismemberments of allegorical de(con)structions and constructions.

One of the remarkable modes of rethinking history and time in modern Western thought has been the dialectical thinking of history: the introduction of a logic of movement where thought enters into the movement of being and follows each of its moments; where essence is not outside of time, opposed to the evanescence of temporal phenomena, but produces itself in time. The word 'dialectic' appears with emphatic, valorizing insistence throughout Benjamin's book on the *Trauerspiel* and later becomes the key figure of historical thinking in his figure of the 'dialectical image.'

Benjamin begins his reevaluation of allegory by shifting from conventional views of allegorical antinomies as oppositions of petrified, frozen concepts and reified images to an understanding of allegory as a dialectical force. His treatment boldly inverts a convention that considers the symbol as an ideal dialectical achievement, a synthesis of oppositions in contrast to the petrified dualism of allegory. Against the proponents of the symbol Benjamin charges that their concept of the inseparable unity of form and content is 'in the service of philosophical weakness [*einer philosophischen Unkraft*]' which loses the content in its formal analysis, and the form in an aesthetics of con-

⁴ Paul de Man, 'Pascal's Allegory of Persuasion,' in *Allegory and Representation*, ed. Stephen J. Greenblatt (Baltimore, 1981), p. 1.

tent, because of a lack of dialectical steeling [*mangels dialektischer Stählung*]’ (I, 336). A few pages later, dialectic returns by contrast all the more powerfully in allegory, when Benjamin asserts that a study of the form of the *Trauerspiel* will show ‘how powerfully the dialectical movement roars in this abyss of allegory [i.e., the abyss between figural being and meaning]’ (I, 342). [On the ‘allegory’ / ‘symbol’ distinction and some critiques of it, see chapters 1 (ii), 12 (i, vi–viii), 13, 18, and 20. —ed.]

What is striking in the articulation of this inversion is that while Benjamin adheres to a metaphoric economy of force and weakness that is itself entirely conventional, he again inverts the positions. He ascribes weakness to the symbolic reconciliations and claimed unities in opposition to the steel-clad force of allegorical power and violence (it ‘roars *gewaltig*,’ i.e., powerfully and violently).

Both the opposition of weakness and force and their distribution by Benjamin can still be linked to Hegel’s dialectic, which does not surrender to quick reconciliation as easily as some conjurors of dialectics would like. When Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, introduces analytical reason (*Verstand*)—the faculty that was also associated in the rhetoric of the period with the ‘cold’ and ‘dissecting’ work of allegory—he opposes its power to the weakness of beauty. The contemporary rhetoric tended to ascribe beauty’s harmonious reconciliations to the work of the symbol. Against this reconciliation Hegel invokes the force of separation:

The activity of separation is the force and work of analytic reason (*Verstand*), of the most astonishing and greatest, or rather of the absolute, power. The circle that rests closed in itself and, as substance, contains its moments is the immediate and therefore not astonishing relation. But the fact that the accidental as such, separated from its circumference—that which is bound and has reality only in connection with something else—that this gains its own existence and separate freedom, this is the tremendous (*ungeheuer*) power of the negative; it is the energy of thinking, of the pure I. Death, if we want thus to call this unreality, is most terrifying, and to hold on to what is dead demands the greatest strength. Beauty which has no strength hates reason because reason expects from beauty what beauty is unable to achieve.⁵

Benjamin’s revision of the dominant aesthetic ideology through a critique of the conventional valorization of the symbol takes off from

⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes. Werke in zwanzig Bänden* (Frankfurt am Main, 1970), III, 36 (my translation).

Hegel and works through the figures of Hegel's language. Thus the closed circle of Hegel's substance that is cut up by the negative power of *Verstand* recurs in Benjamin's text on the *Trauerspiel* as the circle of the perfect, beautiful individual and its symbolic integrity. Benjamin deflates the ideological investment in the synthetic unity of symbol and individuality through a negation, correcting the 'radius of action' of the perfect, beautiful individual, represented in the circle of the symbol, to the radius of a mere imaginary formation, a *Bildungsradius* (I, 337).

The linking of the individual and the symbol in the figure of the circle passes into the image of the whole and intact body. This image is threatened by the allegorical dissections that cut up the claimed indivisibility of the substance into an ever-multiplying series of qualities and oppositions invested with the persuasive force of grammatical subjects. [On different treatments of the figure of the 'body' in ancient approaches to allegory, see chapters 4 and 6; on the more general notion of 'organicism,' see chapters 2 (i), 3 (conclusion), 12 (vi), 18, and 20. —ed.]

The figure of dissection haunts the artistic formations of Modernism. The persistent reference to surgical operations is one of the most productive links between Benjamin and Brecht.⁶ One of its most striking prefigurations can be found in Baudelaire's programmatic dedication of the prose poems to Arsène Houssaye.⁷ It begins with the offering of a genre of texts that can be arbitrarily cut up, a composite in which head and tail can be interchanged. The organic body of the text, sacred to the classic and Romantic aesthetic tradition, turns—still within an organic figuration—into an infinitely dissectable body. At the moment when the poems have given up verse they turn into another kind of *vers*, the descendents of the serpent that brought an end to paradise. In this transformation of the poetic *vers* into the *vers* of death, the worms (*vers*) that eat the corpse and disfigure the beautiful body, Baudelaire has inscribed one of the archetypes of modernism. He opens poetry to a landscape of allegory as Benjamin

⁶ See my chapter, 'From Aesthetics to Poetics: Benjamin, Brecht, and the Poetics of the Caesura,' in R. Nägele, *Theater, Theory, Speculation* (Baltimore, 1991), pp. 135–66, and my essay, 'Augenblicke: Eingriffe. Brechts Ästhetik der Wahrnehmung,' cited above in n. 2.

⁷ C. Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1961), pp. 229 f. For a reading of this dedication in connection with allegory and modern prose see Beryl Schlossman, *The Orient of Style: Modernist Allegories of Conversion* (Durham, N.C., 1991), pp. 245 ff.

envisions it in the allegories of the baroque: 'While in the symbol the transfigured face of nature reveals itself fleetingly with the transfiguration of perishing in the light of redemption, in allegory, the *facies hippocratica* of history lies as petrified primal landscape before the eyes of the beholder' (I, 343).

Baudelaire's *vers* not only shifts from verses to worms that eat the body through to the heart, the core of bourgeois interiority; the word as a word of direction ('towards') also affects the significant directions of modern subjectivity. The inward-direction becomes purely corporeal when Baudelairean self-reflexivity joins the worms and eats its own boiled heart. The outward dimension, which corresponds to infinite interiority in the infinite expanse of the universe (figured in the *ciel*), is emptied by the cruel irony of the *vers*: 'Vers le ciel quelquefois, comme l'homme d'Ovide, / Vers le ciel ironique et cruellement bleu' ('Towards the sky, sometimes, like the man in Ovid, towards the ironic and cruelly blue sky'; 'Le cygne,' ll. 25-6); and when the blind ones 'look' up there: 'Que cherchent-ils au Ciel, tous ces aveugles?' ('What are they looking for in the Sky, all those blind ones?'; 'Les aveugles,' l. 14). Benjamin translates Baudelaire's capitalized, allegorical *Ciel* with a capitalized *Dort* ('There'): 'Was verrät sich Dort den Blinden?' The allegorical direction has become pure direction and nothing else. 'Leer aus geht die Allegorie' ('Empty departs [goes out] allegory'), Benjamin writes with an emphatically inverted syntax in the opening of the book's last paragraph. It goes out There: *Dort*; it is gone: *Fort*.

Yet within the absences of *Fort* and *Dort* there remains insistently an *Ort*, a place, an allegorical *topos*. It seems again to be a place where paths are lost or threads knotted together. It is thus necessary to return again to the beginning, where everything splits and separates into oppositions and antinomies.

The opening of my discussion indicated two elements in Benjamin's approach to allegorical antinomies. He wants to treat them dialectically, beginning at the point of Hegel's strongest insistence concerning the negative, and he invests this dialectic with a rhetoric of strength, power, and violence.

Yet there is something in Benjamin's use of dialectics that displaces it in relation to Hegel's dialectic. Hegel's forceful insistence before the negative leads to a turning point where the negativity he calls death is transfigured into life, prefiguring the ultimate speculative turn of the phenomenology. While the *ponderación misteriosa* that

concludes Benjamin's treatise on the *Trauerspiel* seems to promise such a turn of transfiguration, it remains nevertheless within the 'spirit of allegory,' conceived 'from the beginning as ruins and fragments' (I, 409). Where Hegel makes his turn, Benjamin's conclusion of the *Trauerspiel* holds on to its mourning. It still stands before the *facies hippocratica*: it stands still in the spirit of a paradoxical 'dialectic in standstill' (*Dialektik im Stillstand*) that will indeed become Benjamin's definition of dialectic and of the dialectical image. [On disjunction and allegory in Benjamin's perspective, see chapter 12 (vii). —ed.]

This different dialectic is inscribed in Benjamin's thought from the beginning, and it is inscribed by what Benjamin calls experience in an emphatic sense: *Erfahrung* in contrast to *Erlebnis*. While *Erlebnis* as immediate, lived experience was one of the privileged terms of the period, valorized especially in the context of *Lebensphilosophie* but also current in political rhetoric, Benjamin insists on a concept of *Erfahrung* as an experience mediated and stamped by the letter of a symbolic order that has always already marked the living subject. Benjamin articulated this difference as early as 1912 in his correspondence with Ludwig Strauß.⁸ To his friend's urgent question about his 'Jewish experience' (*jüdische Erlebnis*), Benjamin responds with a categorical negation of any Jewish *Erlebnis* and insists instead on a Jewish *Erfahrung*.

Experience as *Erfahrung* inserts a split into the claimed immediacy of lived experience; it has parted from any immediacy, as is suggested by an element of the word that appears also in *fahren* (to drive, to travel) and *Gefahr* (danger). This split is tied to a specific mode of thought that Benjamin ascribes in particular to his Jewish *Erfahrung*: a dualistic concept of life, exemplified among others in Buber and in himself.⁹ Philosophically speaking, Benjamin was always closer to Kant than to Hegel.

Yet Benjamin insists on a dialectic in this dualism and in the antinomies of allegory. This dialectic does not sublimate the opposite

⁸ The correspondence with Ludwig Strauß can now be found in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe. Bd. I: 1910–1918*, ed. Christoph Godde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt am Main, 1995). For a further analysis of this correspondence see Rainer Nägele, 'Schriftverkehr: Hölderlin. Kafka. Benjamin,' in *Liechtensteiner Exkurse I. Im Zug der Schrift*, ed. Norbert Haas, Rainer Nägele, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger (Munich, 1994), pp. 171–89.

⁹ 'I find in them [the Jews] a strictly dualistic view of life which I find (slightly accidentally!) in myself and in the view of life of the Wickersdorf school. Buber also speaks of this dualism.' ('Ich finde bei ihnen [den Juden] eine streng dualistische Lebensauffassung, die ich (leicht zufällig!) in mir und in der Wickersdorfer Anschauung vom Leben finde. Auch Buber spricht von diesem Dualismus' [II, 837].)

terms in each other; it does not produce synthesis and reconciliation. It is the weakness of the secularized aesthetic symbol that it cannot bear the tensions of the 'paradoxality of the theological symbol' (I, 336). With that weakness the symbolic reconciliation loses its terms in the attempt of sublation—for example, 'the content in its formal analysis, and the form in an aesthetics of content.' Benjamin's articulation suggests instead an intertwining of the opposites in such a way that each term is implanted in the other and remains active in its oppositional force in the other, as its sting and wound, as it were. Thus word and image in the baroque are in Benjamin's formulation not simply opposed as *Wortbarock* and *Bildbarock*, but are fundamentally implanted in each other as polar opposites (I, 377).

The figures of this other dialectic are oxymoron and chiasmus; its technical term in Benjamin is *Verschränkung*.¹⁰ The primal scene of this *Verschränkung* is the configuration of nature and history in the allegorical expression: 'Allegorical expression itself enters the world with a strange intertwining [*Verschränkung*] of nature and history' (I, 344). [On 'interweaving'—more 'fabric'-oriented—in earlier approaches to text and cosmos, see chapters 2 (vii) and 12 (i). —ed.] It might be better to translate *Verschränkung* as intersection, because what is tied together, is entangled, and crosses over in the *Verschränkung* also cuts into the other and engraves itself in the other. This is nowhere more pertinent than in the relation of two terms that form a foundational opposition in most European languages: nature vs. history or culture.¹¹

The claim of the aesthetic symbol is to present and represent a harmonious, 'dialectical' synthesis and unity of nature and history: nature transfigured in history, history transfigured in nature. The allegorical expression, however, enters the world, in Benjamin's words, 'with a strange' (*sonderbaren*) interrelation. One may hear already in the *sonderbar* the *sondern*: the setting apart, the separating that marks this strange relation. History, marked by a nature that is not sublated, and nature, marked by a history into which it is not integrated, become essentially ambivalent and daemonic. *Zweideutig* ('double in

¹⁰ This is a difficult word to translate in its precise connotation: 'intertwining,' 'interweaving' are approximate descriptions; it is usually used for hands and arms that are folded crosswise. In the case of folded arms, each arm forms a figure coming close to a Möbius strip.

¹¹ It is perhaps not superfluous to point out that 'nature' is not a 'natural' term, that there are many languages that do not have a concept of 'nature' that is so privileged and valorized in many European languages and cultures.

significance,' 'equivocal') is the word that Benjamin uses especially in his essay on Goethe's *Wahlverwandschaften* (*Elective Affinities*). *Zweideutig* is the German word for jokes and expressions that are tainted by sexual innuendos. Sexuality is of course the primal scene of the inseparable split of nature and culture in human beings.

And it is in the 'being that speaks' that two speechless forms of expression indicate a difference from 'natural' animals. They have their place at the intersection of 'nature' and 'culture': laughter and tears. In the relation and opposition of laughter and tears the figure of the oxymoron is condensed: opposed to each other, they yet flow together in a witch's brew of pain in pleasure and pleasure in pain; together and yet opposed, they demarcate the threshold of the human world against a creaturely world that has neither laughter nor tears; and at the same time they demarcate the human world as a creaturely world, inscribed by a configuration of guilt, death, and castration against a transfigured and redeemed world.

When allegory enters modern poetry and philosophy, it is marked and signed by laughter and tears. Heine's popular *Book of Songs* (*Buch der Lieder*)—Benjamin puts it next to Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* as the last large-scale success of lyrical poetry in Europe (I, 607)—ends with a series of poems in free rhythm, without rhyme, entitled *Nordsee*. The form and content of these texts undo the genre of *Lied* at the very beginning, in the address to them as *Lieder*. 'Ihr Lieder! Ihr meine guten Lieder! / Auf, auf! und wappnet euch!' ¹² ('You songs! You, my good songs! Up, up and armor yourselves!') The call to arms to the songs is a call to be no longer songs, at least not in the Romantic tradition of the genre. What follows is an exemplary allegorical construction, which presents the process of allegorical construction as a tearing apart of the universe in order to construct a new artifice with the fragmented parts. The call to arms (*wappnet euch!*) is above all a call for an emblematic allegorization in the coat of arms (*Wappen*); and this coat of arms bears the insignia of the laughing tear: 'die lachende Träne im Wappen.'

The laughing tear tears the tear into the sphere of evil spirits and of Satan, who is the master of laughter. Heine's poetry is full of ghostly and satanic laughter, and so is the poetry of Baudelaire, who also wrote a philosophical essay on laughter: *De l'essence du rire*. ¹³ The

¹² Heinrich Heine, *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Klaus Briegleb (Munich, 1968), I, 180.

¹³ Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1976), II, 525–543.

essay is written with the voice and perspective of a *philosophe chrétien*, not because Baudelaire would consider himself a Christian theologian (in fact he explicitly denies any theological competence), but because he insists here, as he did in the *École païenne*, on the indelible historical mark and wound produced by the intervention of a symbolic order under the signature of guilt and remorse, which is furthermore tied to the emergence of a self-conscious subjectivity.

From the beginning of the essay, laughter and pain and tears appear together in a shared realm of good and evil: 'Laughter and pain express themselves through the organs where the command and the knowledge (science) of good and evil reside: eyes and mouth.'¹⁴ And thus, both 'laughter and tears cannot let themselves be seen in the paradise of blissfulness.' Both are 'children of pain.'

This is not the occasion for a reading of this extraordinary text by Baudelaire. But its evocation at this point should underline the degree to which Benjamin's speculative contemplation of allegory is borne by and born of the literary texts of early Modernism. The apotheosis of baroque allegory at the end of Benjamin's treatise is also an apotheosis of satanic laughter and a radical dismantling of self-conscious subjectivity in the theological reading of laughter.

The intersection of laughter and tears forms the monogram with which Benjamin begins to sign off the chapter on allegory and his book on the *Trauerspiel*. 'In the same way as earthly sadness belongs to allegorization, hellish gaiety belongs to its longing thwarted in the triumph of matter' (I, 401). The monogram as the figure of allegorical *Verschränkung*, of the opposition and intertwining of theatrical action and allegorical meaning, the monogram as the lacing of pure decorative lines and vignettes and the meaningfulness of the letters, is invoked earlier by Benjamin in a discussion of the baroque interludes. 'In a complicated configuration meaning asserts itself through and against its action like letters in a monogram' (I, 371). This assertion of a meaning that is simultaneously entangled in the complex confusions of baroque plots and yet separate from its action gives once more the schema of the oxymoron.

Calling the figure a 'schema' invokes the significant appearance of the monogram in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant employs it first to differentiate the 'schema of sensual concepts' from the 'image':

¹⁴ 'Le rire et la douleur s'expriment par les organes où résident le commandement et la science du bien et du mal: les yeux et la bouche' (II, 528).

‘the **image** is a product of the empirical faculty of the productive imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), the **schema** of sensual concepts (as figures in space) is the product and, so to speak, a monogram of pure imagination a priori, through which and after which images are possible in the first place, but which can be related to the concept that they indicate only by means of the schema.’¹⁵ The monogram appears again in Kant’s *Critique* as the figure of a somewhat enigmatic class of creatures (*Geschöpfe*) or products of imagination: ‘Very different it is with those creatures of imagination (*Geschöpfen der Einbildungskraft*) which nobody can explain and of which nobody can give us an understandable concept, **monograms**, so to speak, which consist only of diverse traits, delineated after a rule that cannot be given, and which are less a clear image than a design hovering, so to speak, between different experiences, the kind that painters and physiognomists claim to have in their head, and that are supposed to be a shadow image of their products or also their judgments.’¹⁶

The echo of Kant’s monogram in Benjamin’s allegorical monogram—to call it an echo is itself an overdetermined oxymoron of the very baroque antinomy of sound and writing—this echo of a graphic figure enacts and stages, as it were, the scene and place of Kant’s monogram, hovering between different, even heterogeneous experiences. Benjamin reaches back to a point before developments in the aftermath of Hegel, before the forced reconciliations of the bourgeois nineteenth century, before its secularized historicism and its denegation, rather than overcoming, of theology. [On graphic figures in earlier approaches to allegory, see chapters 12 (iii–v), 15, and 16. —ed.]

Benjamin reaches back doubly: to a moment before the ‘progressive’ nineteenth century—to Kant; and to a moment before Kant and the Enlightenment—to the theological and allegorical confusions and entanglements of the baroque. This gesture brings us back at the end to the beginning of this essay and its antinomy of a Modernity that, I claimed, is constitutively marked by an insistent recourse to earlier, pre-bourgeois, pre-modern moments, and at the same time by an experience of the past that permits no reconstruction.

¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Werke in zehn Bänden*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Darmstadt, 1965), 3, 190. In a yet unpublished dissertation on Goethe’s epistemology and poetics of the image, Fritz Breithaupt connects a reading of these two passages of Kant to the precarious mediations in Goethe’s *Märchen*.

¹⁶ Kant, *Werke in zehn Bänden*, cited in previous note, 4, 514.

We stand before the stunning paradox that one of the most radical theories of Modernism is a book on obscure German baroque plays. That it is indeed a theory of Modernism is not only implicitly and explicitly signaled in the book, but underlined by the fact that all of its major motifs are constitutive elements in Benjamin's later construction of Modernity in the essays on Baudelaire and in the project on the Parisian Arcades. Like his angel of history, Benjamin's materialist historian moves forward backwards: each gesture toward the future is performed in a recourse to a past preceding the immediate past—not to a perfect tense, but to a pluperfect, *plus-quam-perfectum*, more than perfect, that is less than perfect: an unfinished anteriority as the negative of a future whose developed image must not and cannot be anticipated.

This figure of temporality is already fully developed in the first sentence of one of Benjamin's earliest philosophical manifestos, 'The Program of the Coming Philosophy'¹⁷: 'It is the central task of the coming philosophy to turn into knowledge the most profound premonitions (*Ahnungen*) that it draws from its time and the presentiment of a great future by relating them to the Kantian system.'¹⁸ The sentence gives the paradigm for the structure of historical knowledge not only by tying what is to come to a system in the past, but also by articulating the essential function of this move: the transformation of the mode of knowledge itself from mere premonition (*Ahnung*) and presentiment (*Vorgefühl*) into actual knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). This transformation prefigures the temporality and function of the dialectical image in Benjamin's later work: the dialectical image as a moment of waking up from the dream, the moment when the dream becomes readable.

In the second sentence Benjamin declares the relationship to the Kantian system as the only historical continuity that can claim a decisive systematic application and consequence. This insistence on the singularity of a specific relationship adds a further constitutive element to the structure of Benjamin's historical thinking: the relationship in the recourse to the past is a relationship not from the present to the past in general and in its totality, but from specific

¹⁷ 'Über das Programm der kommenden Philosophie,' II, 157–71. An English translation by Mark Ritter has been published in the issue devoted to Benjamin in *The Philosophical Forum*, 15, 1–2 (1983–84), 41–51.

¹⁸ II, 157. English translation cited in previous note, p. 41; translation modified.

moments and elements of the present to specific, fragmented moments and elements of the past (even if these fragments might present themselves in the form of a system). The past as past cannot be reconstructed, but, like the fragmented pieces of a dream, its blasted, fragmented elements can enter into the construction of a readable *Schriftbild*, or monogram. [On allegory, temporality, and problems of historical 'recovery,' see chapters 12 (ii, v–viii), 14, 17, 18, and 20. —ed.]

Benjamin's emphatic recourse to Kant is at the same time a recourse to an emphatic loss: the epistemological and timeless certainty gained by Kant's philosophy goes hand in hand with a loss of any certainty in temporal experience. It is because of this loss, as much as because of the epistemological certainty, that we have to return to Kant. Yet it is also this loss that doubles Benjamin's recourse and sends him back to a time before Kant, to the world of baroque allegories where the experience of evanescence raises the stakes regarding the dignity of temporal experience to their highest point.

What Benjamin uncovers in this allegorical world of the baroque are the elements of a construction that combines the rigor of Kant's epistemological separations and cuts (which German Idealism desperately tried to reconcile)—the wounded experience, as it were—with the experience of the wounds of time, which affect the experience of the individual subject no less than the historical experience at large.

It is precisely at the point where Benjamin reads a Kantian pure reason in the baroque that he establishes the pathological body as the center of affectability, and thus of experience. It is also at this point that he establishes the *Trauerspiel* as the modern drama in contrast to tragedy and tragic conflicts: 'Because the spirit is in itself pure reason, faithful to itself, and because only corporeal influences [*Influenzen*] put it into tangible, sensible touch with the outside world, the painful violence it suffers was a closer basis of vehement affects than so-called tragic conflicts' (I, 391).

The secularized aesthetic symbol is constructed after the image of the intact beautiful body and inseparable from the theory of a unified, homogeneous subject that dominates bourgeois philosophy and psychology. Benjamin's recourse to baroque allegory is an attack on the philosophical presumptions of bourgeois subjectivity, as Freud's recourse to an archaic praxis of dream interpretation is an attack on the prevalent psychologies of subjectivity.

As theoretical as this might sound, the attacks hit, individually and collectively, below the belt. The anxieties they provoke affect not only their targets but their own language. Benjamin's attack on the aesthetic symbol and the 'weakness' (*Unkraft*) of its beauty is explicitly tied to a critique of the collapse of the 'ethical subject' into the individual. The somewhat unusual word for weakness, *Unkraft* (un-force, un-strength), already points with its negation at a more specific cut that becomes explicit on the next page: 'Once the ethical subject has sunk into the individual, no rigorousness—not even the Kantian one—can preserve its masculine contour' (I, 337). Again Benjamin writes within a certain convention: the battle of symbol vs. allegory involves not only a matter of weakness and strength, but a matter of the phallus. But while critics such as Friedrich Theodor Vischer lament the loss of manliness in the allegories of the old Goethe, Benjamin attributes the loss of the masculine contour to the weakness of symbolic beauty and its refusal to acknowledge the cut.

Allegory enters as remainder and reminder of a wound, as the irreducible discomfort in a civilization whose ferociousness increases with the degree of its denegations and presumed reconciliations. [On this issue with regard to the work of de Man, see chapter 20. —ed.] It confronts the narcissistic mirror-images of self-reflection with the drastic images of the dismembered body in 'the significant distribution of a living entity into the *disjecta membra* of allegory' (I, 374). It reminds the subject of self-consciousness of that which is and remains radically foreign to self-consciousness. Benjamin borrows the theological language of the seventeenth century for the articulation of a difference that the philosophical languages seem unable to reach: 'The smart versatility of man expresses itself by making matter human-like in self-consciousness and thus confronts the allegorician with the mocking laughter of hell. To be sure, in this laughter the muteness of matter is overcome. In laughter matter assumes spirit exuberantly in the highest eccentric dissimulation. It becomes spiritual to the point that it shoots far beyond language' (I, 401).

What matters cannot be fully taken in by self-consciousness; it cannot be appropriated by the image that self-consciousness makes of itself, of itself as being human. What matters expresses itself in laughter and tears, in their emblematic and oxymoronic sameness and difference, as the most specific human trait that delineates, in transgression, what separates the human being from itself.

It is at this extreme limit where Benjamin's thinking intersects

most precisely with Freud's revolution. What matters to both is the stuff that dreams are made of. But both insist not on the dream, but on the awakening and the reading of the dream and its labors. When Freud insists that what matters in this reading is not some hidden secret that could then be appropriated by consciousness, but rather the dream labor itself, its work of displacement, and when he insists on remembering instead of repeating, he insists, like Benjamin, on the acknowledgment of a critical difference.

It is a specific difference, but one that reduplicates itself through all levels. It appears in the fundamental split that separates the being that speaks from itself, as well as in the crucial difference of construction and reconstruction. He or she who finds herself or himself will find that difference, as the self-reflective voice of Gregor Samsa is split from its alien, uncontrollable body when, one morning, he 'finds himself.' In that difference appears the ghost who is as much like the king 'As thou art to thyself.'¹⁹

Benjamin links reconstruction to empathy (*Einfühlung*), an act that is also at the center of Brecht's theatrical attacks: *Einfühlung* is an act of identification, of finding oneself in the other instead of finding oneself as the other, and thus always in difference to oneself. *Einfühlung* and reconstruction erase the difference and the pastness of the past. They produce a phantasmagoria that for Benjamin cumulates in the phantasmagoric world of commodities and its state of *Einfühlung in die Warensseele* (empathy and identification with the commodity soul).

Freud seems to be less rigorous in the separation of construction from reconstruction. In a conciliatory gesture in his essay 'Constructions in Analysis,' he even offers reconstruction as an alternative term for construction: 'His (the analyst's) work of construction, or, if one prefers to hear it thus, reconstruction . . .'²⁰ The initial analogy with archeology seems to underline further a notion of reconstruction. But as the conciliatory gesture already indicates, the term is less than adequate. For the analytic ear there is nothing more suspect than what one 'prefers to hear.' At the end of the first section of the

¹⁹ *Hamlet* I.i.59.

²⁰ 'Seine Arbeit der Konstruktion oder, wenn man es so lieber hört, der Rekonstruktion . . .'; S. Freud, 'Konstruktion in der Analyse,' in *Studienausgabe. Ergänzungsband* (Frankfurt am Main, 1975), pp. 393-406; quotation: p. 396. An English translation of the essay is in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. under the general editorship of James Strachey, XXIII (London, 1964), 255-69.

essay, Freud indeed arrives at the point where he takes leave of archeology and reconstruction: 'And now the comparison between the two works [of archeology and analysis] comes to an end, for the main difference between them lies in the fact that for archeology reconstruction is the goal and end of its endeavours, for analysis construction is only a preliminary work.'²¹ Further, this temporality of preliminary work is immediately modified at the beginning of the next section: it is not preliminary 'in the sense that it has to be completed first before one goes on to the next' work. Rather, the work of the analyst's construction and the work of the analysand's remembering go side by side (*nebeneinander*), although one of them always runs ahead and the other follows. It is a curious simultaneity of non-simultaneous syncopation. And while ultimately the one should catch up with the other, Freud suggests at the end that this is not always the case. There is always the possibility of a remaining gap. This gap might be more than just an accidental failure or incompleteness of analysis; it is perhaps the sign of a constitutive incompleteness of any construction of the past. One might even go a step further, based on the third and last section of Freud's essay, where the construction of the analyst and the delusions of the patient appear as equivalents. They would indeed become identical the moment we would be seduced by the persuasive, convincing power lent by the reality fragments to the whole construction and would accept the whole construction as a true reconstruction of the past in a kind of delusionary *Einführung*. The only thing that separates construction from delusion is its insistence on its fragmented constructedness, and its refusal to present itself as a reconstruction.

Construction must go out empty at the end, like allegory. But in this exit, allegory must assert itself as the trope of inversion in a last inversion of itself. The work of construction that is performed and conceptualized by Freud and Benjamin can be read as a determinate inversion of a tradition of allegorization. The tradition of allegorization is also a work of repression in the guise of a 'higher' preservation: the repression of the Greek gods by Christianity, and the more complex and annihilating repression of the Jewish Writing through its transformation into the 'old testament' as allegorical prefiguration of the 'new testament.' [On perspectives and problems

²¹ Freud, text (p. 398) and translation cited in previous note; translation modified.

regarding such allegorization, see chapters 1, 2 (i–iv, vii), 6, 10, 12 (ii), and 14. —ed.] The aesthetic symbol as it is valorized in the late eighteenth century is the cumulation of this repression in the repression of repression itself. The symbol is the ghost of allegory in which the repressed returns in the phantom of a pure incarnation. Benjamin calls it a ‘usurper’ (I, 336), echoing Horatio’s question to the ghost of the king in *Hamlet*: ‘What art thou that usurp’st this time of night . . .?’²²

The symbol’s narrative of a reconciled and transfigured nature and world would then be destroyed by Benjamin’s construction of allegory as a mode that is to be read as Freud read dreams: as allegories of a construction built on a history of destructions.

²² *Hamlet* I.i.46.

ALLEGORY AND THE AESTHETIC IDEOLOGY

Tobin Siebers

My concern in this essay is threefold. First, I will be arguing that the historical discussion of allegory and symbolism is a vehicle for the emergence of ideology critique. To phrase the issue in terms pertinent to this volume, if the Enlightenment defined the symbol in opposition to 'prejudice' and the Romantics described allegory as a form of 'ideology,' how did it happen that we currently view symbolism as ideological and allegory as anti-ideological? My focus here will be limited to the poststructuralist era. [On earlier notions of a distinction between 'allegory' and 'symbol,' see chapters 1 (ii), 2 (i), 12 (i, vi–viii), 13, 18, and 19. —ed.] Second, I want to suggest that different notions of rhetoric have emerged and are contrasted most significantly because of their relative interest in representing human autonomy. This issue is by necessity related to my first concern. If aesthetics opposes ideology, instead of being subsumed into it, it does so only because it represents autonomy better than other resources. This is to recall that aesthetics is a mode of subjectivization and that its major resource in this process is its concept of autonomy. Here my point will be that our view of allegory has changed because of our desire to preserve this concept. Third, I will claim that the target of ideology critique was noticeably deflected after World War II from politics to aesthetics. It was in many respects a reaction to what Walter Benjamin called fascism's aestheticization of politics, and yet not even his perceptive remarks about fascism's equation between politics and the arts explain why such a powerful transformation took place. That aesthetics and ideology collaborate with each other is now a common assumption in intellectual life. Art is ideological, it is widely declared, and, of course, ideology possesses a powerful aesthetic dimension as well. Terry Eagleton, for example, argues that the aesthetic is 'a peculiarly effective ideological medium,' while Paul de Man reminds us that 'the aesthetic still concerns us as one of the

most powerful ideological drives to act upon the reality of history.¹ This part of my argument will require a brief excursus into fascist aesthetics.

Symbolism as Ideology

The word 'ideology' does not occur in 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' (1969), the essay by Paul de Man that reversed in many ways the course of postwar thinking about Romantic symbolism.² Nor does the word appear in the earlier version of the essay included in the Gauss seminar of 1967 in which he first begins to reformulate the role played by allegory in Romantic nature poetry. We have to wait until 1972 in an essay on Roland Barthes to see de Man translate his ideas about rhetoric into ideological terms:

One can see why any ideology would always have a vested interest in theories of language advocating correspondence between sign and meaning, since they depend on the illusion of this correspondence for their effectiveness. On the other hand, theories of language that put into question the subservience, resemblance, or potential identity between sign and meaning are always subversive, even if they remain strictly confined to linguistic phenomena. (*RCC* 170)

The correspondence to which de Man refers is almost certainly a 'natural' one.³ He means to define ideology as having a vested interest in the delusive process by which language sometimes represents

¹ See Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London, 1976), p. 20, and Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York, 1984), p. 264.

² References are to Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, 1983). The first footnote to 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' refers to Barthes's work, and in many ways an essay by de Man on Barthes is a continuation of the footnote, since it makes good on the promise to discuss at greater length the relation between structural linguistics and rhetoric. See 'Roland Barthes and the Limits of Structuralism,' *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism: The Gauss Seminar and Other Papers*, ed. E.S. Burt, Kevin Newmark, Andrzej Warminski (Baltimore, 1993), pp. 164–77. The essay was commissioned by the *New York Review of Books* as a review of Roland Barthes's recent work but was never printed. It was finally published in one version in *Yale French Studies* 77 (1990) and republished in 1993 in the collection to which I refer hereafter in the text as *RCC*.

³ Andrzej Warminski, one of de Man's most faithful commentators, misquotes this passage as follows: 'One can see why any ideology would always have a vested interest in theories of language advocating *the natural* correspondence between sign and meaning, since they depend on the illusion of this correspondence for their effectiveness' (23; emphasis mine). It is an inspired misreading in my opinion. See

arbitrary or political relations as organic. Of course, this definition returns us directly to 'The Rhetoric of Temporality.' The entire thrust of the essay is to dethrone the organicism of contemporary theory by offering an alternative reading of Romantic nature poetry. Presumably, de Man's motivation was to represent a more authentic picture of human temporality, and a certain conception of time, which he would later regret, does pervade the essay. [On attitudes toward temporality and allegory in early interpretation, see chapters 2 (iv), 6, and 14; on perspectives in recent centuries, see chapters 1, 12 (v–viii), and 17–19. —ed.] Against Wasserman, Abrams, and Wimsatt, de Man argues that natural settings in Romantic poetry do not either symbolize original emotions or strengthen the individual self by borrowing from nature a temporal stability that the self lacks. Both are characterized as errors committed by a self that wants to forget its own tragic predicament. De Man worries in particular that his generation of literary critics has absorbed uncritically the tendency among the Romantics to justify their moral and political ideas by attributing a certain naturalness to them. Both Wasserman and Abrams, for example, are said to embrace the eighteenth-century practice of treating moral issues in terms of descriptive landscapes. Abrams apparently accepts that in Romantic poetry 'sensuous phenomena are coupled with moral statements' (*BI* 195), while Wasserman cites favorably a series of lines that portray the world as a reflection of human thought and passion—as a kind of mirror—in which the human being beholds 'in lifeless things / The Inexpressive semblance of himself, / Of thought and passion' (*BI* 195).

Wimsatt, of course, takes the brunt of de Man's attack not only because he appears to believe most fervently, among the trio of critics, in the unifying, organic power of symbolism but because he translates this belief into the method called the New Criticism. For Wimsatt, de Man insists, language supposedly manifests a fundamental unity that encompasses mind and object—'the one life within us and abroad' (cited by de Man; *BI* 194). A few years later in 'Form and Intent in the American New Criticism,' de Man would flesh out his critique of Wimsatt and the New Criticism along precisely these lines. The New Critics' definition of the poem owes too

Andrzej Warminski, 'Ending Up/Taking Back (with Two Postscripts on Paul de Man's Historical Materialism),' *Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and Deborah Esch (New Brunswick, NJ, 1995), pp. 11–41.

much in his estimation to the “‘organic” imagination so dear to Coleridge’ (*BI* 27–28), which causes them to mistake poetic form as ‘the organic circularity of natural processes’ rather than as an effect of the hermeneutic circle of interpretation (*BI* 29). For de Man, then, Wimsatt and the New Critics produce a potentially dangerous mythology in which meaning is defended as natural. And he makes it clear that the danger involved has a strictly political dimension. For he states that Northrop Frye’s mythopoetic theories take Wimsatt’s ideas about poetry a step further, preparing for the possibility of yet another, pernicious political step:

Northrop Frye falls into exactly the same error as Wimsatt and reifies the literary entity into a natural object: with the added danger, moreover, that put in less ironic hands than his own, his theory could cause much more extensive damage. A formalist such as Wimsatt hypostatizes only the particular text on which he is working, but a literal minded disciple of a mythologist like Frye could go a lot further. He is given license to order and classify the whole of literature into one single thing which, even though circular, would nevertheless be a gigantic cadaver. (*BI* 26)

In retrospect, de Man’s argument in ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’ seems to be concerned with human temporality less as a purely philosophical issue than as a predicament that sometimes calls for risky ideological solutions. These solutions rely on a dangerous mythology involving the natural forces commanded by humanity and the necessity of achieving a sense of unity even at the expense of individual human freedom and intentionality. We will have occasion shortly to attach this mythology to a particular political movement. In the meantime, it is sufficient to recognize that de Man’s essay appears to have an ideological ax to grind, especially once we recognize the connections between his views on Romantic symbolism and the definition of ideology found in the essay on Barthes. For de Man criticizes at every opportunity the tendency to represent arbitrary relations as organic. He attacks the ‘supremacy of the symbol,’ conceived both ‘as an expression of unity’ (*BI* 189) and as ‘the product of the organic growth of form’ (*BI* 191), objecting that this ‘original unity . . . does not exist in the material world’ (*BI* 192). He denigrates the ‘organic coherence’ of this synthesis as a profound illusion (*BI* 192). Finally, he complains that the nostalgia for organic unity has become a commonplace underlying literary taste, literary

criticism, and literary history. [On 'organicism' in earlier critical theory, see chapters 2 (i), 3 (conclusion), 4, 12 (vi), 18, and 19. —ed.]

If the symbol is inherently ideological, however, other rhetorical modes used by the Romantics present the possibility of ideology critique. De Man explains that both allegory and irony are 'linked in their common demystification' of the 'organic world' postulated by symbolism (*BI* 222); neither one falls into the 'myth of an organic totality' (*BI* 223). [On 'allegory,' 'irony,' and early Romanticism, see chapter 18. —ed.] This definition requires a reconceptualization of both allegory and irony. Allegory in the early de Man is not subservient to external, cosmological, or dogmatic meanings. Rather, it is a mode of literary allusion. For example, when Rousseau appears in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* to be symbolizing emotions by describing natural objects, he is in fact creating a deliberate allusion to the *Roman de la rose*. The diction of the novel, de Man claims, is hardly 'naturalistic' but controlled by this inherited typology. Texts are systems of allegorical signs in which representations of objects are subordinated not to dogma but to the relationship between signs:

The relationship between the allegorical sign and its meaning (*signifié*) is not decreed by dogma We have, instead, a relationship between signs in which the reference to their respective meanings has become of secondary importance The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can . . . consist only in the *repetition* . . . of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority. (*BI* 207)

This means that allegory, unlike the symbol, does not rely on an organic identity between either subject and object or culture and nature. De Man redefines allegory in terms of the arbitrary, differential drift of sign systems in which the desire for unity or identity must simply be renounced. He reads the word 'allegory' literally, then, viewing it as a mode that always refers otherwise. Allegory plunges language users into a dizzying maze of signification in which no single sign ever coincides with another. [On de Man and signification, see chapter 12 (viii). —ed.]

Similarly, de Man reconceives of irony as a thematization of difference and nonidentity directly opposed to the Romantic ideology of the symbol. He is especially careful, it is worth noting, not to characterize the difference of irony in terms of human difference or inequality. Rather, irony presents a difference constitutive of all

acts of reflection, and this 'reflective disjunction not only occurs *by means of* language as a privileged category, but it transfers the self out of the empirical world into a world constituted out of, and in, language . . .' (BI 213). Significantly, then, language divides the subject into an empirical self, living in the world, and a self that becomes like a sign whenever it attempts an act of differentiation or self-definition.

From the standpoint of irony, then, any attempt to celebrate one's natural superiority over another human being immerses one in a labyrinth of signs in which such acts of differentiation are literally impossible. Allegory, too, we saw, reveals the subject to be in free fall. Any attempt at self-definition, to understand oneself as a living entity, grasps instead the self as a mere sign, which in turn leads to another sign and another, none of which bears any organic relation to the previous one. For de Man, Romantic nature poetry is caught between ideology and its other, between symbolism and allegory.

National Socialism and the Myth of Organic Totality

Only after becoming aware of de Man's wartime journalism, do we have access to the historical dimension of his theories.⁴ This resource alone exposes the historical motivations behind his particular definition and critique of the aesthetic ideology. Similarly, it helps to explain why he chooses to champion allegory and to reject symbolism.

We imagine, for example, the young Paul de Man reading the words of his uncle Henri de Man in 1941: it is time to eliminate 'from our political organism the foreign body constituted by all the residues or embryos of the ghetto.'⁵ As a member of the cultural elite and as a writer on the art beat at *Le Soir*, Paul de Man was extremely familiar with the hygienic and related use of the terms 'organic' and 'natural,' and he availed himself of them on any number of occasions in his own reporting for *Le Soir* and *Het Vlaamsche Land*. In the now notorious essay on 'Les Juifs dans la littérature

⁴ Cf. Cynthia Chase, 'The Trappings of an Education,' *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*, ed. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan (Lincoln, NE, 1989), p. 48.

⁵ Cited by Geoffrey Hartman, 'Looking Back on Paul de Man,' *Reading De Man Reading*, ed. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis, 1989), p. 17.

actuelle' of 4 March 1941, for example, de Man assures his readers that the nature of life in Europe, 'despite Semitic incursions,' remains fundamentally 'healthy' and that the deportation of Jews to colonies isolated from Europe will neither harm the future of literature nor impede the fulfillment of its 'great evolutionary laws' (45).⁶ On 16 March 1942, on the occasion of the Brussels book exhibition on 'The Greatness of Germany,' he defends the pursuit of German unity by explaining that 'the entire continuity of Western civilization depends on the unity of the people who are its center' (207). And some months later, on 20 August 1942, he returns in the pages of *Het Vlaamsche Land* to the same exhibition to comment on good and bad directions in German literature. He condemns authors 'remote from all naturalness'—the direction taken 'mainly by non-Germans, and specifically Jews'—and praises those writers worthy of the German tradition who remain 'true to the proper norms of the country' (325). Like his uncle, then, Paul de Man imagined—at least in his role as an essayist—that the Nazis would unify Europe, creating 'a new ensemble of individual ideals that define a certain human type' and freeing everyone from the influence of 'small clans' closed upon themselves (159). Europe would be a new, united world under National Socialism—not merely a nation in the here and now but an 'eternal community of language and blood' (201).

The Nazis described every relation, every possible link, within society in terms of organic or natural unity. The art and literature of a racially pure German culture was supposed to overcome differences of class and fuse Europe into an organic community. The art education of the Third Reich was supposed to recreate the 'organic link' between artists and the people (*ATR* 73).⁷ Hitler wanted his political

⁶ References are to Paul de Man, *Wartime Journalism, 1939–1943*, ed. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan (Lincoln, NE, 1988). Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. The companion volume, *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*, offers a variety of interpretations, both apologetic and incriminating, of these materials. I recommend especially John Brenkman, 'Fascist Commitments' (21–35); Ortwin de Graef, 'Aspects of the Context of Paul de Man's Earliest Publications followed by Notes on Paul de Man's Flemish Writings' (96–126); Alice Yaeger Kaplan, 'Paul de Man, *Le Soir*, and the Francophone Collaboration (1940–1942)' (266–84); and Edouard Colinet, 'Paul de Man and the Cercle du Libre Examen' (426–37).

⁷ References to Nazi statements and expressions, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from Peter Adam, *Art of the Third Reich* (New York, 1992), cited hereafter in the text as *ATR*. See also *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, ed. Stephanie Barron (New York, 1991), especially in this context, George L. Mosse,

ceremonies and parades to unite power and form in a natural synthesis that was beautiful to see, and when they were described in newspapers and radio reports, the language obeyed his desires and intentions. 'This ceremony was the ultimate in life-giving form,' one report says of Hitler's appearance at the Party meeting of 1934. 'It was an hour of our time, an hour during which life became form' (ATR 89). Nazism's idea of nationhood was one in which the people were joined to the soil and their blood developed according to the higher laws of evolution. And, of course, their art needed to express these laws. That is why German landscape painters were asked to reject Impressionism, mere renderings of light and air, to represent 'the unity between man and landscape' and to interpret 'the eternal laws of organic growth' (ATR 130). This is why Hitler and Rosenberg required art to declare its faith in the ideal of beauty of the Nordic and racially pure human being (ATR 95).⁸

It is crucial to understand what happened to aesthetics under Hitler. Obviously, he made art serve ideology. But this was minor in itself, compared to the lasting effects that the Nazi use of art, literature, and music has had on the historical understanding of aesthetics itself. It is one thing to recognize that a given political movement may make greater or lesser use of art and another thing to conclude that aesthetics is identical to ideology, which was Hitler's position. Not to accept this distinction is not to understand that Hitler possessed a theory of aesthetics and that his theory—as repulsive as this idea may be to us—has become our theory. Who among the current detractors of aesthetics possesses a definition of art substantially different from that provided by Hitler in 1935 at Nuremberg: 'Art has at all times been the expression of an ideological and religious experience and at the same time the expression of a political will' (ATR 9)?

Given my argument so far, it makes most sense to focus a few remarks on the Nazi conception of symbolism. Symbolism for the Nazis defines the process by which a political idea is made manifest

'Beauty without Sensuality/The Exhibition *Entartete Kunst*' (25–32); Henry Grosshans, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York, 1983); and Alan E. Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theater, and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1993).

⁸ See Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1933): 'from Aryan India came metaphysics, from classical Greece beauty, from Rome the discipline of statesmanship, and from Germania the world, the highest and most shining example of mankind' (290, 299; also ATR 26).

in aesthetic form. 'Artistic change,' one ideologue explained, 'is the *symbol* of political change' (*ATR* 96; emphasis mine). Nazi art was designed to be a corrective to the supposedly impure versions of art propagated by Jews and Bolsheviks, and the beauty and truth of this art apparently consisted in its healthy intentions and hygienic character. It showed supposedly what an ideal human being was, and it made one feel good about oneself, since in most cases the audience understood that its own characteristics and virtues were being displayed in the work. It was in this respect, by providing a recipe for the good, racially pure human being, that symbolism could be said, perversely, to satisfy Kant's imperative that beauty be the symbol of morality:

The symbol is the highest and the most difficult and therefore the proudest task of art. Here, it is no longer enough for the artist to portray the deep feeling of a slice of life, to let his fantasy loose, to create a dreamlike world. Here he has to find the most economical, meaningful expression of the thoughts and feelings of his *Volk*. Not just the representation of any figure taken from reality, but the creation of a figure that is the ideal image of the people. (*ATR* 205)

This new definition, provided by Wilhelm Westecker in 1938 in a party organ, contains everything that postwar critics despised about symbolism. More important, it exposes the extent to which the Nazis sought to transform aesthetic theory. They mimicked the history of poetic and artistic defense, twisted its arguments, essential vocabulary, and concerns, and identified the ambitions and desires of artists as their own—but all with a small and pernicious difference. Consequently, it has been hard to trace how the Nazis changed aesthetics and easy to argue that they did not twist or taint anything that was not corrupt and dangerous before they touched it. Art and ideology are one, the argument goes, for National Socialism flows 'naturally' from the logic of Western aesthetics. In effect, then, Goebbels's declaration in 1937 about Hitler continues to echo among us, although Goebbels did not understand, apparently, his own sense of irony: 'The Führer loves artists, because he is himself one' (*ATR* 45).

All of these ideas and others like them must have wheedled their way into Paul de Man's ears. One could not live in Europe and not hear them all the time. This helps to explain why, after the war and after his failures in Europe, the idea of organicism was so emotionally charged for him. It helps to explain why he bristles when he arrives in the United States and finds his contemporaries—Wasserman,

Abrams, and Wimsatt—describing Romantic nature poetry in organic terms and repeating Coleridge's dictum, 'Such as the life is, such is the form' or 'the one life within us and abroad.' It also helps to explain why he would come to define ideology as 'precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality' (*RT* 11).⁹ De Man's view of aesthetic history moves from Schiller's apparent misreading of Kantian beauty as the beauty of the state to Goebbels's 'grievous misreading of Schiller's aesthetic state' as the state aesthetic of the Third Reich.¹⁰ For de Man, then, the natural culmination of the aesthetics of beauty is National Socialism. He knows because he saw it happen. He loved beauty too much, and it happened to him. People loved their country, and they became Nazis.

Allegory as Anti-Aesthetic

The aesthetic has been found guilty of collaborating with fascism, and this collaboration supposedly exposes its essential and deceptive nature for all to see. The historical fact of this perception requires that we take a more enlightened attitude toward aesthetics, which entails that we acknowledge its predisposition to fraternize with ideology and that we make some basic changes. If art leads to Auschwitz, it is necessary to denounce it and to take up the cause of anti-aestheticism. If beauty is ideological, we must find an alternative to it. Today we consider the highest expressions of art to be exemplars of anti-art. Art fails if it does not oppose the pernicious illusions perpetuated by aesthetics in some fundamental way. In contrast to Kant,

⁹ References to Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis, 1986).

¹⁰ Paul de Man, 'Kant and Schiller,' *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis, 1996). I thank Professor Warminski for providing me with a manuscript copy prior to publication. De Man's reading points out that Goebbels's statement, 'politics are the plastic arts of the state,' is 'a grievous misreading of Schiller's aesthetic state,' concluding that 'the principle of this misreading does not essentially differ from the misreading which Schiller inflicted on his own predecessor—namely Kant' (154–55). As a corrective to de Man's reading of Schiller, I recommend Josef Chytrý, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley, 1989), who identifies Herder, not Schiller, as a source for undemocratic conceptions of the aesthetic state: 'By the time of his death Herder . . . had bequeathed his arguments on behalf of the organic state to theorists who overturned his own pacific version of cooperative activity and minimal governmental intervention for romanticist visions of hierarchical autonomy. Herder ought not to be blamed for such travesties of his view, but his thought, "the albatross before the coming storm," was more in keeping than that of Schiller and Goethe with nineteenth-century notions of the modern state and their problematic career' (54).

who believed that aesthetic beauty is a mysterious and ineffable apparition of otherness that takes hold of us without our consent, and for which no explanation can be offered, we prefer to think of art in terms of the political virtues of clarity, forthrightness, politeness, honesty, and purity of motive. Apparitions are deceiving, to turn a phrase, so the ghostlier demarcations of the aesthetic must be suppressed. Purity of motive is paramount. Bad art is mere art. Good art cannot be art.

To what extent, however, is the anti-aesthetic only another means of representing the experience of autonomy? The purpose of the anti-aesthetic is apparently to free us from the pernicious influence of the aesthetic ideology, but how does it represent this newfound autonomy? If we bear in mind the hazards of defining autonomy, this is hardly a facile question. The reason that Kant chose to represent human autonomy aesthetically was because he saw so clearly the paradox involved in trying to define it on the basis of predetermined concepts. To define freedom is in effect to define it out of existence. To analyze it is to murder to dissect. Kant came to the conclusion that freedom may be defined only on its own terms, and since 'its own terms' are not even comprehensible, although we comprehend their incomprehensibility, he proposed an analogy. The analogy is, of course, found in the experience of beauty. The beautiful object is, like freedom, its own definition. Thus, the experience of aesthetic autonomy, Kant concluded, is the closest that we ever come to understanding the nature of human freedom.

The very existence of the anti-aesthetic attests to the fact that we have not yet abandoned the hope of defining freedom apart from *a priori* determinations. For the stated purpose of the anti-aesthetic is to oppose ideology. But we no longer have recourse, after Auschwitz, to either the analogy of beauty or to the symbolic mode as a means of imagining human freedom. Allegory, however, remains a viable choice. The Romantics denigrated allegory as nonart, preparing it as the perfect vehicle for an anti-aesthetics once it emerged, and the allegorical escaped association with fascist ideology by virtue of its marginality in recent aesthetic and political history. Consequently, allegory has become today one of the most obvious tropes by which an anti-aesthetic vision of autonomy is being pursued. Whether called aesthetic or anti-aesthetic, however, the analogy according to which autonomy is conceived may very well remain the same. For if Kant was right about the nature of autonomy, the resources available for representing it are extremely limited. It remains to be seen, then,

whether allegory presents additional resources or merely rehabilitates the aesthetic as traditionally conceived. It also remains to be seen whether an anti-aesthetic representation of autonomy, if it can even be said to exist, is preferable to an aesthetic one.

To this end, I would like to make my way toward a conclusion by glancing briefly at de Man's late theory of the allegory of reading and at another, related use of allegory proposed by Fredric Jameson. My intention is to use the work of de Man and Jameson to illustrate the two responses to the aesthetic ideology that have tended to characterize the postmodern era. Both attempt to control the power of the aesthetic by subordinating it to a master narrative, but the difference between these master narratives is palpable. Briefly, the first approach opposes the aesthetic to a pseudo-aesthetics usually called the anti-aesthetic. It tries to remove the art object from the center of the aesthetic experience, but it usually replaces it with another object. This other object supposedly symbolizes a more 'authentic' experience of autonomy because its aesthetic idea is that aesthetic representation is corrupt, but it ultimately fails because this idea is so totalizing that it destroys the possibility of freedom as such. The second approach is more straightforward. It preserves the traditional view of the aesthetic object but restricts its idea to a particular political philosophy through which it believes autonomy will be achieved. In other words, it responds to the aestheticization of politics with a specific politicization of art.

De Man, we saw, redefined allegory with the intention of cutting it off sharply from 'symbolic and aesthetic syntheses' (*RT* 68). Allegory supposedly deconstructs by its very nature the malignant ideology of the aesthetic. And yet if we read de Man closely, it becomes clear that allegory performs this task in the name of a purer aesthetics, one characterized, nevertheless, by autonomy and the old-fashioned refusal to make any 'pronouncement on the nature of the world' (*RT* 10):

Whenever this autonomous potential of language can be revealed by analysis, we are dealing with literariness and, in fact, with literature as the place where this negative knowledge about the reliability of linguistic utterance is made available. The ensuing foregrounding of material, phenomenal aspects of the signifier creates a strong illusion of aesthetic seduction at the very moment when the actual aesthetic function has been, at the very least, suspended . . . Literature involves the voiding, rather than the affirmation of aesthetic categories. (*RT* 10)

Aesthetics deludes us, de Man claims, by creating the perception of an organic or phenomenal relation between subjects and objects or between language and the world. The allegory of reading, however, debunks the illusion of aesthetic seduction in two crucial ways. First, it exposes the fact that language does not take part in the world. Meaning has no natural origin, despite the ideological claims made on behalf of symbolism. Second, allegorical reading renders visible the pure materiality of the signifier. It puts on display the objective characteristics of the sign by detaching it from its semantic function, thereby stripping language of its ideological and potentially offensive meanings.

It might appear that nothing remains of aesthetics after de Man has finished reading. Literature, for example, appears as pure void. But this is not the case. For the feast of reading leaves a few leftovers on his plate. What remains is the materiality of language as such. De Man peels away layer after layer of symbolic meaning to expose the kernel of the signifier, and this kernel, which is said to be 'material,' comes to represent the actual aesthetic function of language. In short, rhetorical reading strips away the so-called aesthetic illusions produced by symbolic objects labeled natural or organic only to disclose the existence of a deeper materiality, and this new object then comes to symbolize the aesthetic autonomy of language.

It should be noticed, however, that the experience of linguistic autonomy does not refer to the individual work of art, as Kant always insisted. De Man's aesthetic vision is not about either individuality or personal freedom. Rather, the work symbolizes a greater whole—the unity of language—which like nature in Coleridge appears as the aesthetic itself. Language now plays the role of total artwork, so local apparitions of the aesthetic do not possess any particular identity or distinctiveness. They merely stand for the larger whole, which is why de Man's readings always come to the same conclusions, always expose the same law of reading, regardless of the work being interpreted. It is no misuse of the term to say that de Man represents language as a 'state,' if we consider that he defines it as a sphere of existence, characterized by its own form, in which subjects exist under the rule of the external law of this form. De Man was right, then, to worry that technically correct rhetorical readings are 'totalizing (and potentially totalitarian)'—since he of all people understood the meaning of these expressions—for they demonstrate irrefutably, predictably, and repeatedly that language, even though

'defective,' is an enigmatic and sublime totality that organizes human existence (*RT* 19).

De Man's personal experience with the aesthetic ideology of National Socialism, it appears, leads him to repress the aesthetic object, but a new object returns in the form of the materiality of language itself. That this materiality may itself be a fiction and not a true object—for what precisely does it mean to refer to language as material?²—only proves that he has doubly repressed the object. Instead of the aesthetic object, he embraces the idea of language as system. There is no object in de Man, then, only an idea that stands in for it, and because he both presupposes the existence of this idea and repeatedly produces it as the result of individual readings, his theory may be called with justice ideological. For ideology treats all events, objects, and subjects as if they were the logical exposition of its idea. That de Man identifies this idea, moreover, as the only authentic experience of autonomy means in the final analysis that his theory fails as an ideology critique.

Fredric Jameson has on several occasions championed a view of allegory similar to de Man's, although he has the virtue of being clear-sighted about what he is reacting against and about what his political motivations are. He is, after all, a Marxist. In *The Political Unconscious*, he explains that allegory, as opposed to symbolism, opens up aesthetic objects to 'multiple meanings, to successive rewritings and overwritings which are generated as so many levels and as so many supplementary interpretations' (29–30).¹¹ However, these multiple meanings do not oppose ideology at the immediate level, as de Man seems to claim, but prepare the object for 'further ideological investment' because they permit the subject 'to imagine a lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of History' (30). A plethora of allegories exist, then, but they contribute to the aesthetic ideology insofar as they inflate the self-esteem of the subject by representing it as more powerful and stable than it really is. Nevertheless, the very existence of these allegories holds the possibility of making us aware of the multiplicity of interpretations available, and if we then make the connection between these interpretations and a sequence of modes of production, we will begin to see a larger picture that may act as the basis

¹¹ References are to Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY, 1981).

of ideology critique. This picture is called the Marxian philosophy of history (33).

In later work, however, Jameson narrows his conception of allegory, and it acquires a more motivated relation to aesthetic experience. Rather than merely making us aware of the play of the signifier, allegory becomes a medium for politicizing aesthetic pleasure.¹² Allegory triggers 'a kind of dual or stereoscopic experience,' related to the aesthetics of the sublime, in which a subject experiences an object as both the object itself and as a pretext for the representation of a 'sheer unfigurable force' (*P* 72). Jameson calls this representation of pleasure allegorical for a precise reason: it supplements the enjoyment of a particular object with the pleasure of the political issue symbolized by it. The object thematizes the political issue, then, being both itself and other: 'the thematizing of a particular pleasure as a political issue . . . must always involve a dual focus, in which the local issue is meaningful and desirable in and of itself, but is also *at one and the same time* taken as the *figure* for Utopia in general, and for the systemic revolutionary transformation of society as a whole So also . . . a given piece of textual analysis must make a punctual or occasional statement about its object, but must also, at one and the same time, be graspable as a more general contribution to the Marxian problematic' (*P* 73–74). Allegory reveals that aesthetic pleasure is always political, for it opens up the Marxian problematic, that is, the transformability of social relations as a whole (*P* 73–74).

While Jameson reproduces the typical postmodern affiliation between allegory and the sublime, he does not seem to notice that his focus on the object places his theories squarely within the province of the beautiful. For the dual perspective in his definition of allegory is incompatible in the final analysis with either the Burkean or Kantian sublime. The sublime defines in both cases the subjective experience of self-limitation based not on the perception of an entity locatable in time and space but on the rupturing of these categories by an experience that cannot be called objective. This is why in both Burke and Kant the sublime is best referred to the experience of God. If

¹² References are to Fredric Jameson, 'Pleasure: A Political Issue,' *The Ideologies of Theory, Volume 2* (Minneapolis, 1988), pp. 61–74, hereafter cited in the text as *P*; cf. 'Representations of Subjectivity,' *Discours social/Social Discourse* 6, 1–2 (1994): 47–60.

the sublime is to serve Marxist analysis, then, it is better used to represent the experience of confinement felt by subjects imprisoned within the alienating machinery of capitalism. However, Jameson wants art to play a revolutionary role, and this purpose requires that he accept the possibility of moving outside the confines of sublime totalities such as capitalism. It requires, in short, a vision of autonomy. And this requirement explains in turn why he must focus on the aesthetic object, for only the vision of an object that exists in the here and now as its own idea presents a viable analogy for human autonomy. Only this experience effectively represents the conflict between self and other (including other selves) constitutive of the fact of political existence, while simultaneously engaging the desire to resolve this conflict by imagining politics in its ideal form, that is, as a community in which many individuals with different interests and ends agree to agree about a common object: the community itself.

Jameson provides an extremely powerful description of aesthetic experience. In fact, it is so forceful that it subverts his own political agenda. For the beauty of his interpretations begins to collapse the moment that he tries to read the allegorical duality of the aesthetic object in terms of his particular political philosophy. Few people will accept that the defining truth of the political unconscious is the philosophy of Marx. If the idea of a political unconscious is persuasive, then, it remains so only at a general level, the level, that is, at which it reproduces the ideal of community experienced by everyone in the individual perception of the work of art. This is certainly an experience of the *polis*, but it is not a particular one. If this experience is to be called allegorical, as Jameson insists, it appears that allegory summons the aesthetics of beauty only under another name.

Today more art is being made and enjoyed in the West than at any other time in history. In the United States, annual attendance at museums has grown from 200 million in 1965 to 865 million in 1997, and there are currently more than 9000 museums, containing some 700 million artifacts and specimens, with their doors open to the public. In a ten-year period, Germany built 300 museums, and France already has 1000.¹³ A new museum seems to open every day

¹³ Statistics for Europe cited by Régis Debray, 'Universal Art: The Desperate Religion,' *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Spring 1992): 35–41, esp. 36; other statistics provided by the American Association of Museums and the Institute of Museum Services.

in Europe. All of this may be the effect of the increasing segmentation and individualization of Western society, since the aesthetic is a mode of subjectivization. But it may also be a response to the increasing desire on the part of individual members of society to feel at one with society again, to imagine beautiful solutions to the conflicts that they feel between their own inclinations and the desires and needs of the many. If it is true that the political world is now threatened by a growing failure of the imagination and an attendant decline in individual judgment and responsibility, it may be the case precisely because the experiences of the mid-twentieth century have made it impossible for us to think about politics as a craft in which imagination, creativity, beauty, and good taste are crucial.

In 1992 the revenue for museums and botanical and zoological parks was 3.4 billion dollars in the United States. Both *Art Participation in America: 1982-92*, Research Division Report #27, and *1997 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*, Research Division Report #39, of the National Endowment for the Arts, prepared by Jack Faucett Associates (n.p., October 1993 and December 1998, respectively), contain many useful statistics about participation in and attitudes toward art. For example, in 1997 50 percent of adults in the United States attended an arts performance or exhibition during the previous year in contrast to 41 percent in 1992 and 39 percent in 1982 and 1985. Audiences for opera, classical music, and jazz performances were 4.7, 15.6, and 11.9 percent, respectively. Audiences for opera, classical music, and jazz programming on the radio were 10.8, 41, and 39.3 percent. Reading literature was at 63.1 percent.

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This is primarily an index of personal names. Part *i* lists most of the authors named in the volume whose works initially appear at least in large part before 1900. It also includes a range of further reference points, including a number of artists and other individuals (e.g., Alexander the Great), certain movements with names derived from personal names (e.g., Platonism), a variety of editorial compilations (e.g., Talmud, Babylonian), and diverse works of unknown or uncertain authorship (e.g., *Rhetorica ad Herennium*). Persons from antiquity to the Renaissance are frequently indexed according to their first names (e.g., Thomas Aquinas). Part *ii* lists most of the individuals named in the volume whose writing or other activity dates at least in large part from the period after 1900. Part *iii* lists works (e.g., Genesis), traditional authors (e.g., Moses), and characters (e.g., Abraham) in Jewish Scripture and the New Testament. Part *iv* lists a range of characters and figures in other works (e.g., Jupiter, Macbeth). Part *v* lists explicit cross-references between chapters within the volume itself. With respect to the index, the ‘volume’ includes chapters 1–20, not other sections such as the list of contributors.

In cases in which authors named in the main text are also indicated by their names and/or their works in footnotes on the same pages, the index specifies page numbers, ‘&,’ and note numbers—e.g., in the entry for Bloomfield, M.W., the specification of 16 & nn 17, 19. This format is also used in a number of other cases in which information in the notes substantially overlaps with names in the main text. Index entries that include the titles of works in parentheses refer to certain pages on which the names of implied authors are not clearly indicated in the cited passages themselves—e.g., in the entry for Virgil, the specification of 7 (*Aeneid*), referring to the designation on p. 7 of the *Aeneid* alone.

Normally, the index cites editors, translators, writers of introductions, and recorders of illustrations only in cases in which particular attention is called to their work in its own right—e.g., Pines, S.: 9, indicating the reference on p. 9 to Pines’s introduction to his translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed*.

In the indexing of chapters of this volume, part *ii* cites in italics after the names of contributors only the page numbers of their respective chapters at large. The numerous cases of internal references from one chapter to another are cited and coordinated in the final part of the index.

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